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THE VILLAGE OF THE WEST.

VOL. III.

THE VILLAGE OF THE WEST.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I.

A REMARKABLE INTERVIEW.

"IN sure and certain hope of the resurrection to life."

It is hard to leave some of our friends for the last time with such words as these ringing in our ears. The silent burial of the suicide would be almost better than this. Bad as a man may have been, he has surely left, with those who knew him best, some endearing memorials, some genuine regret, some gratitude, some remembrance of kind words, some forgetfulness of unkind things

done and spoken. In this case the mourners may think, as they turn from the tomb, that, as it is not for us to close, so it is not for us to open the gates of the golden city. And it may equally seem that we need not these words to assure us more of the salvation of those of whom we have hope, and that the bitterness of our sorrow for the erring is enough without these to remind us of the depth of our despair. They mock the *de profundis* that still would arise from our souls—nay, we are cruelly compelled to thankfulness when we dare not even venture upon so much intercession. Better seems to us the vague Roman *vale*, that dismissed friends and lovers into a land of which little was guessed, save that it was dim and quiet, than the terrible irony spoken over the sinner—"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to life."

It was as well for Bell Villeroy, perhaps, broken-spirited in the season of his youth, that he needed not to think these thoughts, as he turned from Frank Irvine's grave. If, as in the dark and deep sorrow of these days, he wished that the contagion which had attacked two out of the three inmates of the cottage might not leave the third unscathed—might carry him off after his friend from the dull future of life—Bell Villeroy's wish was not accorded.

A fortnight passed, and he remained at the cottage, but the fever had left it, and at the end of this period Mr. Parfitt gave it as his opinion that they might regard themselves as altogether free of the infection, and as being at liberty to be abroad.

Consequently, a day or two after Mr. Parfitt had thus delivered himself, Mr. Foothorape and his daughter received two visitors.

The editor, in his dressing-gown, was standing on his hearthrug, looking over, with the aid of his meerschaum, some proof-sheets of "The Guerilla." Pauline was also in the room.

"I wonder Mr. Campbell went off with nothing of ours," Mr. Foothorape said, looking from off his proof.

"What was there to run off with?" Pauline asked.

At that very moment the door opened, and Mr. Campbell presented himself. Mr. Foothorape took his pipe from his mouth, conveyed the proof-sheet from his right to his left hand, and, proffering the former member, advanced towards his returned lodger delicately.

"As agreeable as unexpected," he began. "I was only just regretting to my daughter——"

But his lodger made no offer to meet his

hand, and his daughter started and cried out, for at that moment Bell Villeroy followed his father into the room.

"Do you know, sir," said Mr. Foothorape's lodger, "why I refuse to shake hands with you?"

Mr. Foothorape fell back upon the hearth-rug when he saw Bell beyond his father, but, on the whole, was as little confused as might be expected.

"Some little misunderstanding, my dear sir," he said. "About the rent, perhaps, or the linen. Or you dislike the children next door."

"No!" the other returned, leaning on the table. "The rent has been paid, I believe."

"Most punctually," Mr. Foothorape replied.

"And of the linen—though, for the matter of that, it is as dirty as everything else

is in the city of dirt—I have never complained. Guess again."

"My dear sir," Mr. Foothorape said blandly—"would you kindly excuse me from further conjecture. An editor's time," and he came a step forward, and laid his hands upon the proof-sheet—"is not his own, Mr. Campbell."

"My name is not Mr. Campbell."

"I beg your pardon, by what name shall I for the future address you in conversation or in writing?" inquired the editor, comprehensively.

"I don't think you will need to write it again. You have written it once too often already. My name, sir, is William Villeroy."

At these last words, and at this announcement, delivered by Bell's father with considerable emphasis, Mr. Foothorape's sudden uneasiness became too great for concealment.

He absolutely staggered back against the mantelpiece, and the meerschaum dropped from between his lips to the floor.

Pauline, who had shown only the most momentary agitation at the sight of Bell, and had sat apparently listless on the horse-hair sofa, now rose—with a glance of contempt at her pusillanimous father.

"Leave the room and the house, sir," she said to William Villeroy. "Father, this is a plot."

"I have with me," William Villeroy went on, without heeding her, "a document, signed by yourself, Foothorape, which was, at one time, in the possession of my father. This document admits fully that the forgery imputed to me was wholly and entirely yours."

And he went on to detail some other circumstances already made clear in the course of this story, always cautiously dropping his

voice at words that indicated the nature of the offence, so that no one but those within the little room might, by any possibility, hear anything of tangible importance.

"Now," he concluded, "this offence was for many years imputed to me. But beyond the family of the Villeroys, not even so much was known as the commission of the crime. I am willing that this ignorance should continue, and I will agree that only those who now suspect me should be assured that I am an innocent man, which object, of course, cannot be obtained without a distinct assignment of the guilt to whom it is due. I agree, I say, to keep you from public censure, and from the operation of the law. But I agree to do so only upon one condition. Shall I name it?"

Mr. Foothorape's thumbs, turned back into his armlet holes, trembled perceptibly. Indeed, he shook all over.

And at this moment the pale face of Pauline, which had hitherto been impassive, turned intently on William Villeroy. She still remained sitting. Bell came a little more forward.

"That condition is," said William Villeroy, "that your daughter Pauline writes and signs a declaration to the effect that she is not the wife of Bell Villeroy."

Bell gave no signs of astonishment when, standing by, he heard this statement. In fact, he was by no means unprepared for it. His suspicions as to his marriage being really one with Pauline had been first aroused by the earnestness of her attempt to prevent him from seeing her brother when that crapulous young gentleman was refused admittance into his father's house. Thinking over this, Bell had been struck with the idea that the something which undoubtedly was wrong and mysterious, was what his father

at this moment declared it to be. He had noted some curious circumstances at the church—the reticence of his bride, the unusual thickness of her veil, the haste with which she had left him when they returned, at the church-door, to the light of day, and the circumstance that Mr. Foothorape had held the conversation with him in the church, the gist of which was that they should so immediately separate. But as he had never seen Harry Foothorape, nor heard of the extraordinary likeness which existed between the sister and the brother, it was only when the fact that there must be a mystery was forced upon him, that the solution suggested itself. And even then it appeared a wild theory. But it was confirmed by what fell from William Villeroy, and Bell had determined to take no steps towards elucidation till he saw whether his father would force the disclosure.

Although Mr. Villeroy's last remark produced, from causes above described, no effect on his son, it was not inoperative on his supposed daughter-in-law. Bell, looking at her, saw her face quiver at last, and knew that if his father had fired a random shot, it was a very lucky one. But the elder Villeroy had fired no random shot.

"I have discovered," he went on, "that when my son Bell, who had very rashly and imprudently, to speak in no harsher terms, engaged himself to you, Miss Foothorape, and, subsequently, felt respecting the engagement that he had acted as I have described,—I have discovered, I say, that he made amends for his errors, by adhering with a high sense of honour to an engagement of which there was no evidence, and which was contracted in his minority."

"A very wonderful discovery," Pauline

said. "Communicated to you doubtless by my husband."

"Miss Foothorape, you have no husband. My discoveries did not end here. I found out that, anxious to obtain alimony——"

"You lie!" Pauline broke in, with her dark eyes darting fire out of her pale face.

"I don't think that that was her motive, ultimately," Bell remarked interposing.

"It was her motive in this matter at one time," William Villeroy said. "But, however, to be strict in one's behaviour towards the lax, as covetousness in her case was superseded by jealousy, I will say jealousy—I say, then, that furious at the idea that the man whoselife you have ruined was about to be happy at last, yet anxious not to fetter yourself, and with a filial regard for your father (who had not changed his mind about alimony) you attired as a girl your brother Harry,

who is very like you, and easily obtained my son's consent to part at the church door, and consequently he saw little of you on the wedding-day. By considerable ingenuity in respect to the veil, and the choice of the church, a very small and dark one I believe, you managed to deceive him completely."

"And, pray, who is your authority for this very romantic statement?" Pauline asked.

But even her voice faltered; she grasped the fringe of the table-cloth tightly, and her pallor seemed deadly. Perhaps the light was as bad in the little room as it had been in the little church.

"Your brother Harry told me the story in his lodgings the other day."

There was a long pause, and silence of all.

At last William Villeroy produced his

pocket-book, and from it a folded paper.

"Here is a statement," he said, "which Miss Foothorape will copy, I have no doubt, and sign."

And he reached across the table, and left it under her eyes. She sprang up from the sofa instantly, seized it, and tore it across, and the two pieces across again.

"My dear," said her father, who had partly recovered by this time. "Really, this violence before company. My dear, you must sign." And, advancing to the table, he placed writing materials before her.

She took the pen up sullenly, biting its end through.

"I will dictate," Mr. Villeroy said, and he recited the words she had just torn up. She wrote, signed, and then said,

"You must give a guarantee on your part."

"It would be out of place; of no value under the circumstances," said William Villeroy.

"Not the slightest necessity," Mr. Foothorape said. "And allow me to state that I was induced to aid and abet this whim of my daughter's to gratify her tendency to the green-eyed monster, jealousy, from the weakness of parental affection; I felt all the time that my conscience pricked me, and that I was acting wrongly, foolishly."

William Villeroy laughed in his face.

"I opine," he said, "as a student of your character, that you gave your consent to the imposture because you thought that Miss Foothorape, unmarried, might still attract some young gentleman more opulent than Bell, some one whose requirements for a wife were that she should be handsome and sing well."

Mr. Foothorape replied nothing to this specimen of William Villeroy's habit of speaking his mind, and his daughter handed over the renunciation. Mr. Villeroy carefully placed it in his pocket-book, and turned to leave the room.

Mr. Foothorape followed him through the doorway.

"Mind the step, sir," he said. "May I have a word with you, as the father of my daughter?"

"Well?" the other said, roughly, and hardly stopping.

"You see, Mr. Villeroy, your son's long engagement to my daughter has spoilt her matrimonial chances. Don't you think Mr. Bell Villeroy will feel it right, with his strong sense of honour, to keep on the alimony?"

"Don't know," William Villeroy said, shortly again; and he drew the latch of the

street door and passed into the street.

Meanwhile Pauline and Bell had been left together.

"It has been a bitter thing to me this love-making of yours," said Pauline Foothorape, or Pauline Vaughton, as she should rather be called. "I loved you once, Bell, and I would have married you now in good earnest, but for your poverty. You must see I cared for you, or my jealousy would never have been strong enough to take such trouble to prevent you marrying my cousin Clare."

"You have behaved very badly in all respects, on your own showing, Pauline," Bell said. "I have done my best to make you amends for acting with too much youthful precipitation in the matter of my first proposal."

"On my own showing, do you say? Whatever my faults are, I acknowledge

them," Pauline said. "I rather think that after all virtue and vice are mere names. I do not cant, like my father, as you see."

"He is too much inclined that way, and you too little," Bell returned. "I feel this now. I feel that, after all, cynicism is not altogether virtue. I am subdued and saddened by the death of my friend."

"I am glad your friend is dead."

"I am pleased to hear you say so. The remark is strained, and the result of a struggle. Where there is life, there is hope."

"You know," she said, "these things are not as we will have them. If I pray, no one answers or helps. Besides, I cannot pray."

"I don't wish to tax you with your sins," Bell returned. "If you cannot pray, the incapacity is not the cause, but the effect of your misdeeds; but make yourself pray."

"And turn saint, I suppose."

"If you can, by all means. Perhaps you may be content at first with a more moderate standard."

"But one must be a saint, or nothing."

"It appears to me," Bell answered her, "that any one who insists on the saintly standard—or what, I think, you regard as the saintly standard—mistakes the whole scope of the creation. There are all orders of Christians. You are as much a Christian as many a Pharisee."

"Perhaps I will try," Pauline said. "Had you not better follow your father? Certainly I—I beg your pardon, and—and I hope you will be happy with her."

Bell shook hands, and went. He found Mr. Villeroy waiting for him in the street, who, as they walked away together, explained his reasons for having up to this

time withheld from him the second disclosures of Harry Foothorape.

"It is a cruel thing to excite in a man a hope of getting rid of his wife, if the hope is a false one," said Mr. Villeroy.

But Bell was thinking of the odd conversation he had just had with Pauline Foothorape, and made no reply.

CHAPTER II.

MR. COPE'S BAD CONDUCT.

"MR. COPE," said Mrs. Cope, of Marl Villa, to her husband, as they sat at breakfast, about a fortnight after the ball at the Castle, "that is the ninth lump of sugar you have swallowed, by itself, this morning. Your bad habits are growing on you. I would not mind your smoking; for smoking is a manly habit, but there is nothing manly about you, Mr. Cope."

"My dear," Mr. Cope urged timidly, "surely smoking is thought pernicious to health by the Faculty."

"Bother the Faculty," Mrs. Cope returned. "Doctors, so far as I have observed, smoke themselves, as much as other people; but I don't know of any doctor, Mr. Cope, who has a trick of eating lumps of sugar all day long."

"My dear," Mr. Cope replied, "if you think the habit deleterious, I will leave it off."

"I desire you will," Mrs. Cope said, somewhat appeased. "Children, you may go."

Four small Copes arose hereat from four emptied basins of bread and milk, and retired in tolerable order.

Mrs. Cope directed her eyes to the door till the last of her offspring who issued forth forgot to shut it; whereupon, instead of calling the child back, as she usually would have done, she bade Mr. Cope rectify the omission. "Don't follow the child-

ren, Mr. Cope," she said at the same time, "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, my dear," Mr. Cope said, pausing by the door.

"I should prefer your sitting-down, Mr. Cope," his wife answered.

Mr. Cope returned to his seat.

"And looking me in the face," added the lady of Marl Villa. Mr. Cope felt very nervous, as he raised a face of small ill-marked features with a weakly cut irresolute chin, and met point-blank the searching eyes of his wife, that looked at him over a longer, sharper nose than a painter would have loved to copy.

"Now, I want to know," Mrs. Cope asked, after a survey of her husband, which lasted some minutes—"I want to know who the impudent creature was with whom you fell in love, Mr. Cope, at the ball the other night. For you need not think

I don't watch you; you were too long in the conservatory, Mr. Cope."

"Why, my dear, you told me to go there yourself."

"Yes, but not to stay there all the evening," said his wife, taken somewhat aback, for she had forgotten that she herself had suggested Mr. Cope's session in the conservatory. "Now, tell me, sir, with whom did you flirt?"

"With nobody, Mrs. Cope; I spent the evening in talking, not in flirting," Mr. Cope returned, with rather more spirit than he had hitherto exhibited.

"Do not fly up," Mrs. Cope said. "And *do* let the sugar-basin alone; ten minutes ago you promised you would leave off the habit. You see what your word is worth."

Mr. Cope, who had unconsciously yielded to the force of habit, collapsed.

"Now," resumed his wife, fixing him

with her eyes, (the colour of which Mrs. Haggernony has several times stated to be green), tell me with whom you talked, as you call it, longest."

At this question Mrs. Cope's husband became manifestly confused; his face fell and became redder, he fidgeted, and grasped his teacup; finally his hand, in his confusion, returned to the sugar-basin.

"I shan't remonstrate this time," said Mrs. Cope, sardonically, "though you are at the sugar again; for I know it is your confusion at being detected that is now causing you to persevere in your loose, dissolute, immoral, Frenchified habit of eating sugar."

Here Mrs. Cope, of Marl Villa, rose with dignity.

"I have now fathomed the cause of your restlessness by night and absent-mindedness by day, Mr. Cope; I now know

why you have not been the same man since you went to that ball."

Saying these words, Mrs. Cope swept slowly to the door. Having got there, she turned and added—

"I shall leave you till dinner time, when I shall speak again, after more mature reflection. I have always thought you a nincompoop, Mr. Cope. But recollecting your hypocrisy about waltzing," she concluded, in a very passionate tone, "I am sorry to have to add that I now envy the woman whose husband is no worse than a nincompoop."

And Mrs. Cope left the room seriously disturbed. She had reaped the whirlwind. Having fallen into the very bad habit of vexing the unhappy Mr. Cope with accusations for which she knew within herself there was no ground (somewhat as a nervous patient teazes his physician with symptoms

which, were they regarded as grave, he himself would be the first person to repudiate), she derived from Mr. Cope's embarrassment grounds for a really serious suspicion. So she varied from her usual practice of spending most of her morning in the lower part of the house—to the delight of the servants—and went out of doors, hastily putting on a garden hat. The children, who were playing on the lawn, stopped their game, astonished rather than pleased at her sudden appearance. But she passed by them, and began to pace quickly up and down a walk that was thickly fenced on both sides with laurustinus.

"The matter," she said to herself, "was evidently a serious one. William's agitation during the past week had been so excessive. He was struggling with his conscience, doubtless."

But this reflection, though it might have

consoled a moralist, was not altogether a pleasant one to a wife. The more William, as Mrs. Cope felt, struggled with his conscience, the more need there was for a struggle, the deeper was the wound which attractions other than her own had inflicted upon him. Jealousy increased within Mrs. Cope, thus meditating. But when she had travelled up and down the laurustinus walk for a quarter of an hour or so, Mrs. Cope, chancing to raise her eyes, saw something which, in the end, was of service to quiet her suspicions. She happened to look up to the roof of the house, and no sooner had she done this than she gave what Tennyson terms "a marvellous great shriek."

For she saw Mr. Cope plainly outlined against the sky, sitting patiently on the stonework of the central chimney of Marl Villa, and looking steadily in one direction through a telescope. It was, in fact, the morning

upon which he had agreed to wait upon the topmost chimney of his house for the arrival of Mr. Villeroy's balloon, and to share the rest of the excursion of that aeronaut.

During the interval which passed between the making of the engagement and the season of its fulfilment, Mr. Cope had, as his wife had noticed, suffered from frequent fits of trepidation. His life, in fact, had been a burden to him. Too fearful of the ridicule and contempt which his wife would pour upon him, he had not confided to her his aerial project. Instead he had remained silent during agonies hardly less than those which the Spartan boy concealed beneath a like reticence, when the fox gnawed his entrails.

And Mr. Cope's embarrassment, when his wife put to him her crucial question, had now an obvious cause. He was afraid to men-

tion Mr. Villeroy; for he knew that Mrs. Cope would insist on knowing not only that he had conversed with that *savant*, but also the subject of the conversation.

The sufferings of Mr. Cope, then, during the period referred to, were, as I have said, of the acutest. His hope was that Mr. Villeroy would be content with a short voyage, and he felt that, this once over, there would be a great reward for his present sufferings. He had been often and often laughed at, to his face, for his uxorious submissiveness. But who henceforth could accuse him of cowardice, when once he had been up in a balloon? His reputation for intrepidity would be established. Therefore Mr. Cope, of Marl Villa, remained faithful to his engagement, and ascended, with trembling steps, and in a cold perspiration, the ladder which conducted him to a trap-door in the roof of his mansion. Therefore he placed

himself on the centre chimney. But, looking along the wide prospect that lay before him for the approaching balloon of Mr. Villeroy, he felt his courage evaporate, and began to determine that he would keep his engagement only so far as to await Mr. Villeroy, but not to accompany him.

Mr. Cope, however, looked over the breadth of silent sunny landscape, with its green and golden fields and red fallows, and woods almost as red with November, that undulated betwixt the residence of himself and Mr. Villeroy, in vain. Once he thought, and a shudder thrilled him, that he saw the balloon in the distance; but it was only an extraordinary puff of smoke from the distant chimney of a cottage that stood upon rising ground.

Thus, patiently sitting on the edge of the stone slab that topped the brickwork of his middle chimney, Mr. Cope, in this remark-

able attitude, caught the eye of his astonished wife. Her first feeling was a half-repentant, half-terrified one. The idea flashed across her that Mr. Cope, driven to desperation by her attacks, was about to commit suicide.

"Come down, my dear!" she shrieked at the top of her voice—"come down directly!"

Mr. Cope, in reply, removed his telescope from his eye, let his dangling legs drop on the roof, and assumed a half-standing position, but blandly shouted a reply.

"My dear, I am expecting a gentleman."

Mr. Cope had to repeat this remark in his loudest tones three or four times; for while it is easy to hear what is addressed to you from a lower elevation, it is proportionately difficult if the positions of hearer and speaker are inverted. However, Mr. Cope succeeded in being audible, after making

several proclamations from the house-top.

"Expecting a gentleman!" his wife returned, at the top of her voice, when, at last, she heard him. "Expecting a chimney-sweep, Mr. Cope! That is the only class of persons who would be likely to meet you there. But perhaps," shrieked Mrs. Cope, around whom, and gazing up at their father, were by this time her amazed children—"a chimney-sweep is your idea of a gentleman."

Mr. Cope, not knowing quite what to shout in reply to this sarcasm, lifted the telescope, and looked again towards the horizon, to see if the balloon was coming. Mrs. Cope, who saw his face move, felt her former fear return. Surely Mr. Cope was not about to take a wild leap from the top of Marl Villa? A double fear seized her—one for Mr. Cope's life, the other of Mrs. Haggernony's pity.

"Come down, my dear!" she again exclaimed—"or I will come up."

In reply to this, Mr. Cope stooped, and opening the trap door in the roof, soon altogether disappeared. In about five minutes he reappeared from the house, and presented himself to his wife and family, covered with cobwebs.

"My dear," Mrs. Cope said, "you have not improved your new alpaca coat by getting among those spidery rafters and places."

"I should like to give an explanation," Mr. Cope said, "if you would send away the children, love."

The mistress of Marl Villa having for once followed a suggestion of her husband's, Mr. and Mrs. Cope paced up and down the laurustinus walk alone. Mr. Cope explained everything; and at the end of his statement Mrs. Cope kissed him.

"But how could you be so foolish, Mr. Cope, as to expect Mr. Villeroy to call just now in any way, much less in a balloon? I hear he only returned last night from following that shocking girl; and everything at the Lodge is at sixes and sevens, of course."

CHAPTER III.

TOUCHES AT THE ISLE OF MAN.

MATTERS, indeed, at Villeroy Lodge were, as Mrs. Cope had declared them to be, at sixes and sevens. So deeply was the disaster of the elopement felt, that there was not even much attempt made to put a decent exterior on things, as is commonly done. Mrs. Villeroy, when, on returning from the ball, it was found that the suspicions engendered by Marmaduke's disappearance were true, had real hysterics; nor did she leave her bed for the next day, nor for many days.

On the following morning, Mr. Villeroy

and Baker pursued the fugitives, with the very satisfactory result of a discovery made some three days after, that a couple resembling them had sailed from Liverpool by an Isle of Man packet. Mr. Villeroy and Baker thereupon enjoyed a singularly rough passage to the island; and, on disembarkation, they were further exhilarated by observing Marmaduke actively offering himself to the passengers as a light porter on the pier. Not so much gratified as he might have been at observing his son-in-law's preference for honest industry over the sentimental idleness of the honeymoon, Mr. Villeroy rushd up to him and shook him by the shoulders. Baker came up more slowly, but as a belligerent, judging by the expression of his countenance, so far as it could express anything. Marmaduke, however, was a sharp lad, and equal to the occasion.

"If you don't leave go, I'll have you up," he said, with tolerable coolness.

And Baker, who was less impetuous than his sire, pulled the latter away. The upshot of the affair was that Mr. Villeroy found from the runaways that they had been married in Liverpool, that their pecuniary resources were now reduced to three and ninepence, and that Marmaduke proposed to support himself and Luciana Mary by means of a lurry—that is, a vehicle which would convey the luggage of passengers to and fro between the steamboats and the hotels.

The Isle of Man, it appeared to Mr. Villeroy and his son, was as desirable a place of residence for Luciana Mary and Marmaduke as could be found at this juncture. Mr. Villeroy therefore gave his daughter money enough to defer the lurry for the present, and returned home to invoke the full aid of his wife and family for a deliberate de-

cision upon the case. But he returned home as angry as ever. For Mr. Villeroy, as before has been remarked, was afflicted with nothing more than monomania, and in other matters was as ordinary a person as the average human being who owns a good-sized country house, with a proportionate property, and with wife and family. So he felt Luciana Mary's conduct acutely enough, both in the regard in which he ought to have felt it, and in those in which he ought not. And he forgot science, and invented nothing for a month.

As for Baker, he too was annoyed. He was not a man who made much sign, but you might judge that he was vexed by the fact that he did not put in an appearance at any of his next half-dozen cricket-matches, whence arose discomfiture to the Ojibbeways. His appetite also was affected. It increased, thus showing mental disturbance.

Mrs. Villeroy was, of course, the most conspicuous in her woe. She was always in bed, was peevish, and, for the time, at least, quite lost the portion of natural kindliness which extenuated her character. She was vehement against Captain Pigot, who, she said (most unjustly), had trifled with Luciana Mary's affections. But she chiefly vented her ill-humour on Clare, who, notwithstanding, assiduously attended her. Broken-spirited as Clare herself was about this time, she tried to cheer Mrs. Villeroy, though the latter amiably replied to this attempt by asserting that Clare's cheerfulness was owing to her jealousy of Luciana Mary, now gratified by the latter's social downfall.

Clare would have borne this imputation, had it seemed to her hard, by reflecting that Mrs. Villeroy's fretfulness was not unnaturally caused. For Clare knew that Luciana Mary was really loved by her

mother, and that, after all, Mr. Villeroy's disappointment was not altogether caused by selfish worldly motives. The best woman in the world would be a little put out, perhaps, if her daughter ran away with a footman. But Clare bore her aunt's ill-temper more easily, for she knew her aunt, and had for her a conscious contempt, and, if she tried to suppress that, an unconscious one.

Nevertheless, in these dull days, Clare was almost broken-hearted. For some time the clouds had been darkening the vernal sky of her life; and now they grew darker. Doubtless summer would come, she thought, but not the summer when the sunlight hardly ends, nor the soft music of the west ceases, day after day. Her summer would be grey, and as she took her solitary walks now, over leas that were sodden with the heavy dank late autumn, and among woods the brilliant

colours of which were but the hectic hues of approaching death, she wished more than once that the end were as near to her as to the year; and the lover she hoped for was he who, as the Islamites believe, is the fairest of fair among all the angels. Yet Clare went on doing her duty as well as she could, though the thoughts within her were of despair, and the voices around her were cold or worse. Baker Villeroy was habitually almost rude to her, in revenge, perhaps, if it were worth my while to analyse his feelings. But it vexed her much more that, somehow or other, her uncle, with whom she had hitherto had a good understanding, just now turned against her. He was annoyed at her rejection of Baker, and alienated by his wife's denunciation of her conduct, in first of all refusing their son, and then, when some slight opportunity was offered of making amends to the family by

marrying a baronet, being ungrateful enough to reject these addresses also.

"She's as foolish in her way as Lucy in hers," Mr. Villeroy said one day in answer to a tirade of his wife against Clare. "If the Sultan threw her his handkerchief, she wouldn't pick it up."

In which last surmise Mr. Villeroy was very likely correct. Yet, in spite of all the persecutions from without, and perturbation within, Clare did not, as she might have done, leave Villeroy Lodge, but stayed there. She was, it must be borne in mind, but a girl, after all, and not a woman of the world, who might have borne those disturbances better; and she was quite independent of any one, and free to go or come as she listed. Lady Carfax, who was by this time really attached to her, had shown to her no sign of disappointment touching the Baronet's rejection. On the contrary, she

had again written to Clare earnestly asking her to return to the Castle, where, she wrote, no one was staying at present. It would be superfluous to point out how very much pleasanter just now the Castle would be to Clare than the Lodge. But Clare replied simply that she could not leave her aunt so soon after the late unfortunate occurrence, but hoped to accept the invitation before long. Lady Carfax, having read the letter, went out to water the fuschias, saying to herself that the Baronet was an unfortunate young man indeed.

And amid it all, if Clare's hope was dead, her fancies survived, and went ever northwards, northwards. She walked amid the woodland silences, broken only by the falling patter of the leaves. She looked out long at the red narrow sunsets of November, over the bare wheatlands and meadows where the tender green was no

more; she watched the night gather in power again now over the skies, silent, and empty, this month, of the swallows; but her heart was elsewhere, and she hardly noticed the reluctant death of the summer in the pleasant south of England. There arose before her rather the blackened gathering of towns, the countless sordid streets, the unrest of the cormorant heart of industry, the broad canopy of smoke that hangs scarcely broken between the first flowing of the Mersey and the last flowing of the Ribble.

But Clare went on, doing what she had set herself to do; that is, rectifying as much as possible the derangement that befell just now at the Lodge, putting a good face on things, and showing that she, for one, rejected the imputation of disgrace having fallen on the family, and being, to the outward eye, cheerful and genial; on which

account, as before stated, she was charged by her aunt with entertaining the mean feeling of gratified jealousy. Thus she went on, stifling her own misery. There was a touch of the heroic in the girl. It may be that hers appears no great, as certainly it was no ostentatious act of self-sacrifice. But how many of us are capable of real self-sacrifice at all? We give up every day, those of us who profess righteousness, little things it may be—things that cost us a moment's irritation or disappointment, and we are so much the better for doing it. But when self-denial assumes considerable proportions, when temptation is strong, if, reader, you feel no weakness then, you are of the few. The multitude of us know, I think, when we are strongly tried, how much our professions of virtue, our pretty newspaper platitudes, our superiority to the publican and the sinner, avail us;

and well if we can so much as reach the foot of that Cross from which virtue goes forth in the midst of the gathered darkness. When self-denial assumes considerable proportion, when temptation is strong, if, reader, you feel no weakness then, you are of the few. For few they are who have learnt to count life as a little thing, to measure rightly the sad strange seventy years, to know that they see through a glass darkly, to trample down the rebel passions, to feel the sweetness and the slightness of Death, to think of self-denial as but a transient trifling strenuousness, to hear with a noble scorn and weariness at their hearts, and a nobler fearlessness and hopefulness in their souls,

> "The sullen Lethe, rolling doom
> On them and us and all things here."

Thus the days went on, and the autumnal sadness deepened around Collington into its

last forlorn season of November, and Time brought nothing to make amends for the ruin he was now making in the woodlands, and had long since made in the sodden meadows. The evening-time was spoiled now of its long glories and soft glooms, but still Clare often went abroad in it; its sombreness fitted her mood, and the dank leaves falling around her, and the sun hastening to go down, were as her hope was, and as her life would be.

It chanced that one evening, in the early part of the month, she was returning from a longer walk than usual, and was passing along the low foggy meadow by the river, while the swift strong winter darkness was beginning to gather over the land. It was hardly safe walking; the fog was thickening over the leafless willows of the damp holms—so thick, indeed, that Clare, before she was aware of him, caught up a stranger,

who was slowly walking near the river side. He turned out, when she started a little, and glanced at him, not to be a stranger at all, but no other than Sir Bayard Beevor.

"Sir Bayard!" Clare said, halting and holding out her hand—"what are you doing here at this time?"

He flushed and stammered. "I—I am staying at the inn here," he said.

"And how long have you been there?" Clare asked, quite as a cursory question.

Hereat Sir Bayard's flush and stammer did not leave him, but increased.

"A month, Miss Vaughton."

"A month!" But at this point of the conversation some surmise as to the true cause of Sir Bayard Beevor's protracted sojourn in a public-house of no great size crossed Clare's mind. She flushed in her turn, and stopped speaking, looking her best, though. For in Clare's face there was

always, in her large grey-blue eyes especially, so much thought, that anyone who looked closely seemed to see its constant rivalry in her countenance with such bloom and grace as dwells with girlhood, not with wisdom. And of late her thoughtfulness and sorrowfulness had grown greater, and had almost succeeded in banishing from her face this same rivalry of youth. It returned now, as she forgot her deeper cares for a moment, and stood, flushed and confused, thinking, aright, that she had fathomed, in his love for her, the cause of Sir Bayard's residence at Collington.

Sir Bayard had taste and delicacy enough to carry on the conversation, not so as to increase her slight embarrassment, but to diminish it.

"You see, Miss Vaughton," he said, "I've been wasting my time hitherto more than most do, and I wanted a quiet place to read

in for my degree; and the inn here is a quiet place. There is attached to it a good dry skittle-ground, where, in the mornings, I take my exercise by myself. Not being anxious for publicity, I rather shirk it in the afternoon, when there is a great deal of play going on."

"I should think, then," Clare said, "that the inn was not a very quiet place for study in the afternoons."

"I never read in the afternoon—a most injudicious practice; no medical man approves of it," the Baronet said. "I always go to sleep, and take a walk in the evenings, as you see. Let us walk a little, Miss Vaughton—it is not well for you or for me to stand still in this foggy twilight."

"But," Clare observed, pacing on beside him, "if you play skittles by yourself in the morning, and go to sleep in the afternoon,

and take a walk in the evening, when do you read, Sir Bayard?"

"You are satirical, as usual," the Baronet replied. "I did not say I played skittles all the morning, or walked all the evening. I read three hours every morning, and three most evenings; and," added Sir Bayard, in a more serious tone, "that is better than doing nothing but walk up and down the High at Oxford, to which pursuit I have devoted the last two years."

"I thought it was term time at Oxford now," Clare remarked.

"Yes; but I am keeping a grace term," Sir Bayard answered. "I—I thought it better to cut my old associations for a time, you know. In a modest way, Miss Vaughton, you see I am trying to reform."

"I scarcely know how much you need reformation, Sir Bayard," she returned. "We all need it. But I am very glad you

are mending. And now it is getting quite dark, and I must be going home. We are in rather a confused state at the Lodge just now; but I hope," she said, hesitating as she shook hands with him, "that you will come up and see us more than once. Playing by yourself every morning in the good dry skittle-ground must be a trifle monotonous."

And thereupon she left him. He looked after her, and noted her tying a grey scarf she wore, which her walk had made loose, and kept—a lover's way—this last attitude in memory.

"How awkward it is," she said to herself, as she went up a swell of the meadows, on the top of which some length of wood intervened betwixt her and the high road that led to the Lodge—"I wish I could have given him a proper invitation; but that would have been encouragement. Of course

his selection of this very odd place to read in was made on my account. With the best intentions, I make not only myself miserable, but everybody else. But that is what people with the best intentions always do."

And must it be confessed, there flashed across the mind of Clare, overburdened with the long stress of anxiety, a moment's wish that she had never seen Bell.

"It is not always that one feels," she said to herself, " 'that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.' I need never have married, or I might have learnt how to make myself marry Sir Bayard."

But this lighter mood was of the briefest, and the sorrow and the darkness returned as Clare opened a narrow gate at the top of the knoll and passed into the wood.

Meanwhile, the Baronet, on his part, ruminated, walking very slowly, and keeping,

now the fog was up, a due distance from the river-side.

"What a dolt I am!" was one of his reflections. "I ought not to have been so over-scrupulous. I ought to have hinted the main reason of my coming here. Why, if she lived in the Black Country, I should go and live among the pits and furnaces, and prefer them to the Lake District! Hopeless as it is, I should have liked her to know it; and she would not have been displeased to hear it. I'm just the sort of man a girl dislikes."

Overpowered by these reflections, the Baronet unconsciously quitted the path which led from the river to the inn, and, the stream being perplexed just here, lost himself in the fog for a time, and, instead of passing on, unconsciously retraced his steps. He wandered about for some time, not being able to see more than four or five yards before

him. He kept his distance as well as he could from the river. But it was well he lost his way; for, just as he had mastered the difficulties of the situation, and hit again on the one of the various intersecting paths which would lead him to the inn, a sudden sound reached him through the dim, gloomy air. It was the crack of a pistol shot; and it proceeded from the summit of the knoll up which Clare had departed.

Such a sound at such a time was strange; and instantly Sir Bayard thought of Clare with no inconsiderable alarm. He ran quickly up the knoll, at the top of which the fog was thinner, and a few stars by this time shone in the rare interspaces of sky above him. He opened the gate which Clare had opened, and, impatiently kicking aside some of the dead leaves that were heaped round it, hastened into the wood. The shot, he fancied, had been fired some

twenty or thirty yards within; and he pushed on through the leaves, which, having now mostly left the trees, did not hinder such light as there was from penetrating the wood.

At the spot which he had guessed, Sir Bayard, however, paused suddenly, and his face turned as pale as the few stars by the indistinct glimmer of which he saw what he saw—a prostrate form—a girl's!—Clare's figure, stretched apparently lifeless in the grassless space between the two gnarled roots of an oak, just wide enough to contain the dead or dying girl. Her arms were stretched out over her head, and the fingers of one hand grasped the brown lichen on one of the oak trees.

"Clare!" Sir Bayard said in an agony, "is it Clare?"

And he knelt down with all haste by her, and bent close over her for a nearer examin-

ation in the difficult light. But he uttered a cry of horror when he saw blood. Blood welling out over the very grey scarf which he had noticed Clare tie closer round her neck only a quarter of an hour ago!

CHAPTER IV.

THREE FOLLOWERS.

CLARE had been expected home in time to make tea for her uncle and cousin, but, when she did not arrive after a quarter of an hour's waiting, they sat down without her. Tea is not the liveliest of meals to the male sex, and Mr. Villeroy and Baker were, at first, as dull over it as were the days just now at Villeroy Lodge.

"Where can Clare be?" Mr. Villeroy asked at length. "She surely cannot have gone straight up into her aunt's room."

Baker, replying nothing, began upon a fourth poached egg.

"It has occurred to me," said Mr. Villeroy, who had substituted himself for Clare as tea-maker—"it has occurred to me that it would be a good idea to amalgamate, upon the British teatable, the sugar-basin with the cream-jug. I wonder whether the mandarin beneath his—his—what tree would the mandarin sit under when he took tea? I have a vague notion," went on Mr. Villeroy, after pausing for information from Baker in vain,—"I have a vague notion that mandarins drink tea under trees that bear enormous fruit as big as cricket-balls."

The allusion to cricket-balls extracted a remark from Baker.

"You're thinking of the willow pattern, I should say. I've noticed what you mean, on the plates," Baker answered, who, indeed, had presented himself with an unusual amount of opportunity for this kind of superficial observation.

"I've combined the willow pattern with Robinson Crusoe," Mr. Villeroy said. "There is a mandarin who takes tea, in Robinson Crusoe, and a tree with big fruit in the willow pattern. But I ramble. And as for inventing anything, even a simple combination of two such ordinary receptacles, I haven't the heart for it. Now the question still is, Baker, what shall we do about Marmaduke? We've been turning it over for some days now, perhaps you—" Mr. Villeroy said, balancing the sugar-tongs, and looking rather hopelessly at his son, "Haven't you formed an idea, Baker?"

In reply, Baker chipped a boiled egg.

"At present," Mr. Villeroy resumed, "it seems desirable that, on the smallest allowance possible, they should remain in the Isle of Man; though I have some fears that, as we cannot supervise him at such a distance, Marmaduke may break his word,

and resume operations with the lurry."

"The longer they are in the Isle of Man the better," Baker said. "As for the lurry, let him work it if he likes. A chap might do worse than work a lurry."

"The Isle of Man is a good way off," his father returned; "but it would get round, and drive your mother wild."

"Would you pass the butter-knife?" Baker returned. "If it made her go on lying in bed," he continued, "I should not so much mind."

"Well," said his father, "have you thought, or can you think of anything?"

"Can't say that I have," Baker replied, after about five minutes' pause—"thinkin' bothers a chap."

"I mean about Marmaduke—what line he'd better take up? He's clever. There's the church," said Mr. Villeroy—"he might be a clergyman."

"Or a professional cricketer," Baker suggested, with sudden animation. "He's got a very good notion of bowling."

His father ignored this suggestion.

"Or a business would be better—say a land-agent. There's not much to learn, and, if you're lucky, there's a good deal to be made. I wonder Clare doesn't turn up. She might get Lady Carfax to recommend him for some distant agency. Ring the bell, Baker, we'll send out the tea-things."

"Let's have the toast-rack filled over again first," said Baker, as he rang.

"Is Miss Clare come in?" Mr. Villeroy asked the servant who answered the bell.

"No, sir."

She had rather a scared look, and Mr. Villeroy noted it.

"What's the matter, Jane?"

Whereat Jane explained that a young person—leastways, a young man, had come

up from the village, and some young lady was dying at the Wheatear.

"Not Miss Clare! Does he know who it is? Send him here!" Mr. Villeroy exclaimed, in great alarm, and neutralizing his own suggestion by rushing off madly in the direction of the kitchen. Here he experienced more difficulty—at first in consequence of a sudden fit of bashfulness which seized the young man (who had previously been the delight and ornament of the assemblage). At length, however, Mr. Villeroy elicited as much as the young man knew, which knowledge was rather vague than clear, and scanty rather than copious. He simply had heard that a young lady had been carried, nigh dead, into the Wheatear, and that Doctor Thring had been sent for, and Mr. Curzon the Curate; and he likewise understood that "the young gent, him as was

staying at the Wheatear, had had a hand in it."

Eager to disseminate the information, and from another cause of a more interesting nature, bearing reference to Jane, the young man had hastened up to the Lodge with the offering of the first fruits of the village rumours.

Mr. Villeroy put some more hasty inquiries respecting Clare to the servants, to no purpose. Repentant of his late conduct to his niece, and alarmed and anxious, he at once set off, accompanied by Baker, for Collington.

The darkness of the November night made it seem unlikely they would meet any one on the way; but, before they had walked three yards, some one passed them whom Baker recognised and addressed as Bob.

"Do you come from the village?" Baker asked.

"Have you heard anything of Miss Vaughton," Mr. Villeroy interrupted anxiously.

Bob (who was attached to another of the servants at the Lodge, and was following thither Mr. Villeroy's first informant) was diffuse in reply. He understood that a young lady, dead or dying, had been brought into the Wheatear, that the clergyman and the doctor had been sent for—all which, so far, had been conveyed to Mr. Villeroy before. As to who the young lady was, Bob could not say, but he thought that, if it was Miss Clare, he should surely have heard.

"An excellent suggestion; the best you've made to-day," Mr. Villeroy said, warmly. "Of course it must be a stranger; if it had been Miss Vaughton, the fact would have been in everybody's mouth."

Then he took out his purse, and while

Bob proceeded with his account, at last succeeded in the darkness in assorting five shillings. Meanwhile Bob went on with his statement. There had been a gentleman staying at the Wheatear, keeping very quiet, and he was gone clean off to-night. Bob expected he knew something, if he liked. But Mr. Baker knew about him, of course.

Mr. Baker said that he knew nothing about him.

"That," Bob observed, "made it more mysterious-like than ever. Why, Sir Bayard Beevor had been really three weeks at the Wheatear, and, now he came to think of it, fighting rayther shy-like all the time. But he was druv off in a shay."

At this point Mr. Villeroy, as well as he could in the dark, presented Bob with the five shillings.

"I know where you're going, Bob," he said; "make yourself comfortable, and tell them to give you a good supper." And, so saying, Mr. Villeroy pushed on.

They walked a quarter of a mile, and were within a hundred yards of the first cottage of the village, when they were again met by a man who, this time, was first recognised by Mr. Villeroy, senior. This was a ponderous, slow-walking, slow-talking person, regarded amongst his friends as rather an authority on some graver matters —such as politics, for instance. Attached, and, in fact, engaged to the cook at Villeroy Lodge, he too was on his way thither, with the view of spending the evening; for while Mrs. Villeroy kept her bed, there were revelries by night in the servants' hall.

Mr. Villeroy stopped hurriedly, to question the slow-speaking man, and, in consequence, stamped his feet for ten minutes

while that individual informed him of about half of what he had already known. At last Mr. Villeroy got rid of him, and had walked on some twenty yards, when he again heard his voice shouting. He and Baker stopped, and the man, returning, came up to them. Mr. Villeroy and Baker having waited till he had recovered his breath, he said he "had forgot to mention as the dead young lady at the Wheatear was Miss Clare; but perhaps Mr. Villeroy knew as much a'ready."

This last statement shocked even Baker; and as for Mr. Villeroy, he instantly started off, and ran down the village at his top speed, tumbling in the dark against a water-spout, and other projections from the houses, and having a complete fall once over the kerb-stone into the miry road. Thus spattered with dirt, and in a manner very undignified for a county magistrate, Mr. Ville-

roy arrived, running, with Baker at his heels, in front of the Wheatear.

Whatever darkness and silence there might be upon the lonely, wet stretches of country road outside, and over the rest of the village, all in front of the Wheatear there was bustle, noise, and lights borne to and fro. The grand elm that rose in the midst of the widened area before the village inn showed its great, indistinct dome—bare now of foliage, blackened as it was displayed by the lanterns which kept passing underneath it. There was a crowd before the doors of the inn. Within, at the bar, there was much ado to appease the thirst of inquisitive Collington; and all the taps were going at once. The bar-parlour was thronged, the tap-room was thronged. The slightly crass bucolic mind had received a shock—alarming, agreeable.

When Mr. Villeroy was recognised, in

spite of his tarnished appearance, there was a general giving way, which he noted, and his heart went heavily against his side, for he thought it was an indication that the dead girl was some one of his connection; though, had it occurred to him, he might reasonably have opined that loose ideas, derived from the fact of his being a magistrate, were working with the Collingtonians. But he could not stop to inquire. He would see for himself. The local policeman, who was on duty in the neighbourhood of the bar, stepped forward when the rest stepped back, and the landlady came from behind her bulwarks, curtseyed, and said,

"Perhaps, Mr. Villeroy, sir, you'd like to go upstairs, and would prefer that Vicars" (the officer's name was Vicars) "should show you the corpse."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Cuppler," Mr. Villeroy said as he passed, hardly pausing from his

run, and springing on to the narrow staircase in front of the policeman. Baker followed behind that officer more slowly, the colour, however, gone from his face. The landlady noted his agitation, and coming out, touched his coat tails.

"Try one of the captain's biscuits you often take, sir," she said, "and a nip of brandy before going upstairs. It's a sight you need be peart like to see."

But for once Baker rejected aliment, and closely followed his father and the policeman.

Mr. Villeroy opened the first door at the top of the stairs.

"Not that room, sir," the policeman said. "That was Sir Bayard Beevor's—this next, sir—number four, sir."

Mr. Villeroy opened number four. (By reason of the occasional arrivals of tourists and fishermen, Mrs. Cuppler had advanced

with the march of intellect, and had increased and numbered her bed-rooms.)

There were lights and people in the room, and instantly, on Mr. Villeroy's entrance, he saw the dead girl—she lay face to face with him—with an expression of pain on her features, for the shot that killed her had gone through the left lung, just above the heart, and not through the heart itself. So death had not been calm or instantaneous.

Mr. Villeroy looked but for one moment, and then with great, but, perhaps, excusable indecorum, before the eyes of the curate, the doctor and the female watcher, who were in the room, executed some rather unbecoming indications of joyful surprise.

For Clare's face was not the face of the dead girl. Clare's hair was brown, not black, and her complexion, paler as it had grown lately, was not colourless ; nor would it have the pallor of that which lay before Mr Ville-

roy, even were it lifeless; and the curve of Clare's lip, though resolute, was sweet, not sullen. Yet, although the strange girl was hardly as tall as Clare, there was some likeness in the figure, and even a far-off one in the face.

CHAPTER V.

TEA-TABLE TALK.

THE rolling cycle of events had brought round again, on this night to be memorable henceforth at Collington, an evening-party at Mrs. Thring's. Even when it first assembled, before any hint had been given it of the occurrences of this night, the party had more to talk about than had, usually, a Collington tea-party. Luciana Mary's elopement was a subject that was still in its first bloom; but there is no need here to repeat what was said on that subject, while Mrs. Thring's seldom-used red and gold tea-cups

were being passed to and fro. Much was said also, particularly by old Mrs. Haggernony, about Mrs. Cope of the Marlpit. That lady, it appeared, had declined Mrs. Thring's invitation, her excuse being that Mr. Cope had a cold. Now Mr. Cope had had a cold, (in reply to the invitation notes of the third best set), for some period, and it was felt to be quite time he recovered, especially as it was known that the indisposition was not keeping him from his ordinary pursuits.

"That woman 's off her head ever since she went to the ball at the Castle, and waltzed, for a married lady, overmuch in my opinion, though I'm not strict," said Mrs. Coulson, the land-agent's wife.

"They say Mr. Cope is going to be made a magistrate, Mrs. Coulson. Is your tea to your liking, Mrs. Haggernony?"

This last remark was conveyed up a long speaking-trumpet, which the Scotch lady,

who was temporarily deaf, had brought with her.

"What are they sayin' aboot Cope o' the Marlpit, the puir fule?" demanded Mrs. Haggernony in return.

"Going to be made a magistrate," Mrs. Coulson bawled up the trumpet.

Mrs. Haggernony lifted up her mittened hands.

"A magistrate! a bailie! Cope o' the Marlpit a bailie!"

"Better than a bailie—a county magistrate," Mrs. Coulson bawled again.

"Gie me anither cup o' tea," Mrs. Haggernony said, emptying her present one, and immediately producing her snuff-box. "Ye may put a wee drap o' brandy in it, Mistress Thring." And, during the remainder of the repast, the old lady was silent, meditating, doubtless, on Mr. Cope's claims to his coming distinction. And several of the com-

pany may have been led by this circumstance to look with favour on Mr. Cope as an administrator of county justice, when he was shortly afterwards gazetted. For they were relieved from conversation with Mrs. Haggernony, which, always difficult, was just now next to impossible, by reason of her deafness and from the troublesome speaking-trumpet.

But events of more thrilling importance even than Mr. Cope's prospective elevation were soon brought before this fortunate tea-party. Rumour came flying from the Wheat-ear. The girl lying there dead—the strange subsequent disappearance of Sir Bayard—the arrival of Mr. Villeroy and Baker—the consequent spread of the news that Clare, too, had disappeared—all these delicious tit-bits following each other made that tea-party the quintessence of tea-parties. It was not pleasure—it was ecstasy; horror followed mystery, and mystery horror; and Mrs.

Thring's guests thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Everybody was afraid that the young baronet had had something to do with the death of the unknown girl (who was reported to have made a dying confession to Mr. Curzon, the curate). Else why had he come to the Wheatear? and why had he gone from it? He had played skittles there—Mrs. Coulson hereupon supposed that he was bad—but always by himself—on which she changed her mind, and supposed, more charitably, that he was mad.

Captain Pigot looked in—evidently by no means in his wonted cheerful spirits—and reported the disappearance of Clare, which Mr. Villeroy, after ascertaining to his great relief that she had not been shot, instantly, with the aim of getting some information, made public. How it was that the cook's stout lover, who agitated Mr. Vil-

leroy by reporting Clare's death, derived his idea, remains, by the way, a mystery to this day. But it is a peculiarity of deliberate, slow-speaking, impressive men, when they are wrong to be absurdly wrong, and to take up, now and then, wild and baseless theories. When Sir Oracle falls, he falls like Lucifer. I do not exactly wish to compare Mr. Villeroy's cook's fat lover either to Sir Oracle or Lucifer. But he had a remote resemblance to the former, and I think I have mentioned before that he was reputed wise in his village circle.

For the second time that evening Mrs. Haggernony's mittened hands went up, when it was conveyed to her, through the medium of the trumpet, that Clare had disappeared.

"Perhaps eloped with the Baronet!" Mrs. Coulson shouted up the trumpet.

"Na, na; she's a guid lass, and a sonsie.

Aiblins there's as dour work aboot her as aboot t'ither."

Mrs. Coulson did not like Clare. She reiterated her theory to the company.

"It almost looks as if that girl had tried to stop them running away together, and been shot for her pains," Mrs. Coulson added.

But this theory was generally rejected, and Mrs. Coulson felt that she had gone a little too far.

"Well," she said, "it's unlikely, considering what we know of Miss Vaughton. But I must say I never liked her. Certainly not strictly good-looking after all. Mr. Coulson—who is an excellent classic—often says that her face has no Greek regularity—her forehead is not low enough."

Mr. Coulson had read Bekker's "Charicles," by mistake, regarding it as a novel.

"She has beautiful, thoughtful eyes," Mrs. Thring said.

"Of which she is very conceited," Mrs. Coulson remarked. "And she is so satirical."

"Oh! Mr. Ferdinand, do you like satire in young ladies?" Miss Coulson, Mrs. Coulson's youngest sister, said to a gentleman who sat next her.

"No, Miss Coulson—it is abhorrent to me. It is not the Endymonian idea of womanly attractiveness."

Mr. Ferdinand was Mr. Thring's assistant. The poet Keats was a surgeon's assistant, and Mr. Ferdinand, in appearance, unfortunately, was like the poet. Consequently, by assuming the poet's character, he attempted to carry the resemblance further.

"Mr. Ferdinand, will you sing, for a change?" Mrs. Thring said.

I do not know, and it would be rather difficult to ascertain whether the poet Keats had a tenor voice, but Mr. Ferdinand had one, and he sang sentimental songs only, in a very interesting manner. He sang just now, after a good deal of persuasion; giving himself a great many more airs than Mrs. Thring thought in his position he ought to show. Miss Coulson accompanied him, and "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye," was the somewhat trite ballad he interpreted. But he looked more than once into Miss Coulson's eyes as he sang it, and succeeded in leaving, when he had finished, a somewhat romantic impression of himself on the minds of the ladies present, not excluding even Mrs. Haggernony.

"Laddie," she said, in the silence that followed the song.

Mr. Ferdinand did not like being thus

addressed—just after producing his sentimental effect, especially. But worse was in store.

"Ye may sing sweeter than ony bagpipe, but I dinna heer ye. Now, if ye'd sing me just a bit verse up this troompet, ye'd please an elderly body."

And Mrs. Haggernony fitted her trumpet to her ear, and extended it, as an elephant might extend his trunk, towards Mr. Ferdinand.

"I—I should be delighted, but I—I really," Mr. Ferdinand said.

"Now, Mr. Ferdinand," said some of the ladies, who saw the fun of the thing.

And the romantic Mr. Ferdinand was compelled, after some further pressure, to sing the last verse of "Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye," up Mrs. Haggernony's long speaking trumpet. She smiled a Scotch

smile of approval, while the notes came up the guttapercha tube to her ear; but Mr. Ferdinand felt that his effect was spoiled, and that he himself was ridiculous. He hoped that Mrs. Haggernony would demand the same favour from Captain Pigot, when that warrior followed with "Yes, let me like a soldier fall" (in which he made some mistakes.) But Captain Pigot escaped, for he had hardly sung his last note when Mr. Thring came in from the Wheatear, and of course all the ladies were eager to hear any information he might think proper to give them. And Mr. Thring was in a position to add a good deal to the news already received. The curate had been admitted to hear a portion, and a portion only, of a confession which the dying girl made to Sir Bayard Beevor. And he had informed Mr. Thring, and wished the informa-

tion to be generally spread, that this confession completely exonerated Sir Bayard, as also Miss Vaughton, from any suspicion that might be attached to them. It is pleasant to have to say that, when Mr. Thring had made this statement, the faces lifted up to him round the loo-table, on which a very languid game at commerce was proceeding, brightened. Clare Vaughton was far the most popular of the ladies of Villeroy Lodge; in fact, without being a great favourite, was more or less liked by most of the villagers. And even Mrs. Coulson, as she listened, arranged the fan of her cards with no expression of disappointment; for her spites were small, and if her enemy had thirsted, she would have given him drink.

Mr. Thring had yet another highly-seasoned delicacy for the palate of curiosity. Three

quarters of an hour ago, there had walked into the Wheatear from Foxfield—having arrived by the last train—a tall young man, with a handsome pale face, who, on collecting what had occurred, to his evident agitation, had had an interview with the curate. The upshot of this interview was that the new stranger, who, on entering the inn, had engaged a bed for the night, changed his mind, hired the best horse that was resting in the inn stables, and rode off along the splashing ways to Cliffborough, the large sea-port not very far distant.

"We heard him just now galloping past the window," Mrs. Thring remarked.

And conjecture began to be rife as to who this stranger might be.

"Why hadn't Mr. Villeroy, or Baker, or both, followed Clare?" more than one lady asked.

Mrs. Thring presumed that it was because the chase after Luciana Mary had been so unsuccessful. But Mr. Thring thought that from some reason or other very much less had been told him than had been revealed to the barmaid, or even to the tall stranger. The gossips were at a loss, and made nothing out of the many guesses that they gave over the lately-introduced sandwiches and sherry.

"Something," said one lady, "has been happening somewhere else."

It was quite a new view of things to most of Mrs. Thring's female guests to realize that anything ever happened at any distance from Collington; and this remark was received as a bold and brilliant one. It happened to be correct; and what had really occurred will be best ascertained by reverting to the course of events proceeding under that

great northern smoke canopy which for some time has ceased to overcloud this story.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FOOTHORAPE GOES SOUTH AGAIN.

"WELL," Mr. Foothorape said, when his visitors had departed, and he, returning, had placed himself in his old easy attitude—his thumbs in his armlet holes, and standing on the hearthrug, lighted and smoked his meerschaum. Habit is the only source of practical philosophy, and such a life had this adventurer led, that he was habituated to exposures and defeat.

Pauline betook herself to her music-stool, and in a half-absent way was playing a few irresolute chords of a sad Scotch melody.

Her father waited till she paused, and then, half turning towards her, said—

"Something must be done, you know. We are in a predicament."

"We are always in one."

"To an extent," returned Mr. Foothorape —"to an extent. Usually we are in, I may say, a narrow and difficult pass. But now we are in a *cul de sac*, and must get out, of course. We must level a mountain. To drop metaphor, something must be done—some grand *coup*."

"Some unusually dirty trick, I suppose," Pauline observed. "Once for all, you may do it yourself. Neither in large nor in small wickedness, will I help you any more."

Mr. Foothorape had looked rather downcast at hearing the first part of his daughter's speech, but at the last a gleam of hope

irradiated his countenance. He laid down his pipe, and spoke earnestly.

"It is not what you chiefly object to," he said, "which I have in my eye. It is what fools would call a great wickedness that I design."

"Is it?" Pauline said indifferently. "But I have no doubt in your hands that even the sin of an angel would become contemptible."

"Your remarks," Mr. Foothorape said, taking up his pipe again, "are a little rude in tone, for a daughter, at least. But I am indulgent to a beloved child."

"And scorn does not move you," Pauline returned, striking a chord. "It is characteristic of you that you don't feel it."

"Don't I?" the editor returned. "Why, I felt it this very morning for Blagg. He's sent another letter and a new account,

dunning for payment for his poetry. Here it is," and Mr. Foothorape pointed with his pipe to a letter on the table. "'To Isoline,' 6*s.* 8*d.*," he continued. "I've a contempt for a man who so desecrates the Muse." And Mr. Foothorape glowed, conscious of a noble enthusiasm for the dignity of art.

"To me," Pauline said, "it seems that your contempt is misplaced. Blagg, like most people, is dependent on his own work for support. Every one has his special line, and Blagg's is writing verses. I suppose he can't very well help making them; and they take up a good deal of his time. They prevent him from concentrating his powers on lucrative work, and so handicap him unfairly in the great race of life. Instead of contemning him for wanting six-and-eightpence for 'To Iso-

line,' you ought to contemn yourself for offering so little as six-and-eightpence, and for keeping him out of his money so long. Of all the absurd and baneful things ever done by a poet, the absurdest and most baneful was the refusal of Burns to accept money for his poetry."

"There is much force and novelty in what you say," Mr. Foothorape observed.

"Don't," said his daughter.

"Well, then, I have heard you speak bitterly of poor Blagg's bad taste in the matter. But charity begins at home, and we must consider ourselves first. Now I wish to unfold to you an idea of a scheme I have. You know this girl Bell will marry; Clare Vaughton has money."

"I will listen to none of your schemes," Pauline said. Her pale face, though, had just flushed the least when Bell's marriage

was mentioned, as Mr. Foothorape, who carefully noted her, perceived.

Pauline said no more, but left the room. Her father looked after her, and when she had gone, resumed his pipe and stuck his thumbs in their old receptacle, with less of a disappointed appearance than might have been expected.

"She'll come round," he said to himself. "She's a weathercock."

Mr. Foothorape prophesied with astuteness. Through most of that night Pauline, sleepless, debated whether she should adhere to what she had professed to her father, or give place to the demon of jealousy, of unjust cynicism, of indifferent wickedness that, beaten down, again rose within her. Much of Pauline's life had been spent in conflicts of this kind, between her good and bad angel, and the latter had almost in-

variably won. But not without dust and blood had any victory been gained. The good angel had retreated, indeed, ever farther back from the original frontier he had defended, and each time had waged a less hopeful contest. In strong contrast, in truth, to its hard-won triumphs over his daughter, were the bloodless victories of Temptation over Mr. Foothorape.

The girl, indeed, had something noble about her. She had, at least, the hate of mean things, a hate that sinneth not. She had some points of resemblance to Clare her cousin.

And how was this? some one may ask. I confess I answer with much reluctance. I am conscious that I can only account for it in a very plain, old-fashioned way, than which this remarkable century of ours has invented several better. Pauline, one sciolist may

say, was a victim to the inexorable law of statistics; she was wicked, that she might complete a registrar's tables. Circumstance, and not Pauline, was guilty, another says. Another, who knows, or professes to know, nothing of that war which Bunyan has chronicled (a somewhat enthusiastic, narrow-minded historian), observes that Clare was good by nature, and Pauline bad; and somehow does not seem to see that this theory excuses Pauline altogether. While a disciple of Walt Whitman sees no difference at all, in point of moral goodness, between Pauline and Clare; for he regards virtue as a sort of magic lantern, which is exhibited to instruct children, but which bores, rather than otherwise, adults. I hardly dare to say that the reason which I would give for the difference between Clare and Pauline is that Clare was a strict Christian, and Pauline,

it is hardly necessary to add, was not. By which I do not mean to say that Clare had a distinct theological turn; indeed I am afraid that she was somewhat reticent about her religion, and her preaching was the least part of her practising. Not that her practising was anything very conspicuous. But one sometimes doubts whether the burning and glimmering lights do not, like their literal compeers, deepen as well as illume darkness; whether—I speak with hesitation what may offend a much misrepresented party—the subtle influence of an average right-thinking, right-acting person is not better than such meat for adults as may be poison for infants, and whether a wedge cannot be more easily driven in by the thin edge than by the thick. We resist high precept, but we follow quiet example.

Mr. Foothorape made his own tea, and sat at breakfast next morning alone for some time, possessed alike by hope and anxiety.

At last Pauline came down. She had not slept till late in the morning, and looked paler even than usual. Her dark eyes had of late grown hollower somewhat, either because of the lapse of her youth, or of the weariness of her career, or for both those reasons. Now they were sunk more than ever after her vigil. She sat down opposite her father at the poorly furnished table without a word.

He looked at her, and said,

"I was going to pursue the subject I started last night. *Necessitas*, as the Latin poet suitably observes, *non habet legem*."

"Well?" said Pauline.

"What we want," Mr. Foothorape re-

sumed, "is money. The fact that this is precisely the requirement of everybody else, renders it difficult to get money. I could philosophise on the point at some length; but you would be an indifferent, nay, a wearied audience."

"I should," Pauline said.

"Have you any suggestion?" her father asked. "Your late descent to the breakfast table—though far be it from me to complain that I am this morning my own tea-maker—the marks of sleeplessness on your face, suggest that during the time it has reclined on the pillow, your head may have devised a project."

"Do keep your trick of rhetoric for fools," Pauline returned. "I suppose you have planned something that you yourself, even, stick at, you are so long in coming to the point."

"Clare, the girl Bell wants to marry, is rich," Mr. Foothorape said, this time with sufficient abruptness. "Will you aid me in procuring a more right adjustment of things, a more equal distribution of wealth?"

"Yes," said Pauline with sudden suppressed anger. "How?"

"A little idea has presented itself," Mr. Foothorape returned, taking up and playing with a horn eggspoon. "Across the ocean, as my friend Blagg would put it, they might, rhyming, term it a notion. I thought of administering an opiate somewhat stronger than a physician's to Clare, and then of removing her to some locality where I might control her actions so far as not to let her go without a sort of ransom. It's hazardous, but its audacious, and what I admire is pluck."

"People generally admire most that

thing of which they have least themselves." This was the last sarcasm Pauline ever levelled at her father.

Mr. Foothorape now went on swimmingly and benignly. "But, in the first instance, you must catch your hare; and, if I am to be the cook, I cannot at the same time be the sportsman. I thought, perhaps," he continued amiably, "that you might like to hunt her down."

An almost savage glitter flashed through Pauline's eyes, and faded quickly.

"But," Mr. Foothorape added, "I think, in this case, the snare rather than the gun must be employed. There are, indeed, a brace of pistols in the cupboard there."

"Let me have one of them, and I will help you."

"Do you propose to shoot her?" Mr. Foothorape asked. "That would not be desirable."

"I propose to help you, as you seem to wish to suggest," Pauline said. "But I should like that pistol. Is it good and true?"

"It ought to be," the editor returned. "I bought it from a low sort of character I saw hit seventeen sparrows, sitting, with it one after the other. He was in difficulties, and the purchase was an economical one. It's a pretty little thing, mahogany stock, nice and light for a lady's hand. My dear, if you will promise not to shoot Miss Vaughton,—I mean not to let your nervous excitability get the better of you,—I will make you a present of the weapon."

"I accept it; and now what am I to do?"

"I was thinking," Mr. Foothorape said, "that if you and I went down together to Collington—and—these November evenings are long; you know if you could manage to

meet Miss Vaughton on one of them, and enter into conversation."

But the scheme which her exemplary father now propounded to Pauline in the rough will become manifest as performed after its maturity, during the progress of this story, and it need not be separately stated here.

When, after two hours' debate, they had arranged their plan of action, Pauline said,

"Very likely, after all, Bell will be there before us. The scheme is wild enough without being made more difficult. Let us go down to-day."

And at twelve o'clock the two were rushing southwards. Pauline said little on the journey, Mr. Foothorape drank much. More than once it repented the weary, broken-hearted, wicked girl of her infamous designs. But her pride rose up, strong as a

rebel angel, and such fellow-passengers as noted her pale, handsome, sullen face, knowing nothing of the grave dark matter she was meditating, saw no irresolute movement of lip, no tear in the dark sullen eyes.

She sat quiet, with her hands folded before her, and her eyes looking absently out, as they speeded to the south by many a length of stubble and fallow, and many a sweep of rolling hill; by faint blue horizon distances, across windy wide champaigns; by village and town and tower, by the gleam of graceful rivers; but by no glimpse of the sea, for their course was from the north to the south of the English midlands, past the black bare peaks and ridges of Derby, and the broad undulant lands of Staffordshire and Warkwickshire, to the soft hills and the golden woodlands of beautiful Somerset.

But though Pauline was quiet as the autumnal landscapes through which she went, Mr. Foothorape was restless. He inveighed against the fewness of refreshment stations; he drank more than was good for him, even in the short spaces of time given him; he got out at half the stations, and the guards remonstrated with him more than once upon the platforms, for he delayed the trains. He attracted public attention, and was as disturbed as Pauline was composed.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS PLAN PROCEEDS.

MR. FOOTHORAPE and his daughter, having duly got down at Foxfield Junction, walked to the small inn at Collington, at which, it may be remembered, Mr. Foothorape had before exercised his genius.

Pauline had objected to their lodging there now. But she admitted, after some debate, that it was necessary; or, at least, that no better plan was feasible for obtaining the information he required.

They went to the inn, therefore, and took lodgings for the night, Pauline remaining

during the evening in the little parlour, where the same lambs, in short jackets of wool, surveyed her from the mantelpiece, as had watched the negotiation of Frank Irvine and her father.

She had a somewhat forlorn evening, at least a lonely one; for Mr. Foothorape, who had expressed his recognition of the landlady, graciously condescended to smoke, in place of his favourite meerschaum, a cigar for the good of the house. His appearance among the rustics was benignant and magnificent. The bar of this particular inn was not the fashionable one of Collington, which regarded the Wheatear as its hotel. The landlady made excuses to Mr. Foothorape for the company she expected.

"Not at all—not at all," replied that gentleman. "A bold peasantry, their country's pride, I like to converse with them.

It gives one ideas. The lower class of agriculturists are oppressed in this country—in this county, I was about to say. I wonder," said Mr. Foothorape piously, "where people expect to go to who think their labourers can keep a wife and six children respectably on ten shillings a week. Poverty is the right arm of temptation."

For once he uttered words of truth; he spoke with too little rather than too much severity of the infamous niggardliness which grinds down, and disheartens, and brutalizes the peasantry of fair Somersetshire. A sad thought indeed that, by reason of the injustice of their fellow-Christians, these unhappy drudges, through all their weary, monotonous life-struggle, must repine that their lot should have been cast among these broad fair valleys and rich bowery hills, these dales, red with saintfoin

and golden with charlock; these downs, where the blue moth wanders from flower to flower, when glowing summer covers the shires, and the wind of June is murmuring from blue Mendip to the glitter of the sea.

"I dare say," pursued Mr. Foothorape in his conversation with the landlady—"I dare say some of the gentlemen's servants about here drop in now and then. I think the last time I was here I met a very intelligent, good-looking lad. He was in the service of a Mr.—Mr.——"

"Villeroy," said the landlady.

"That was the name," Mr. Foothorape said—"I think that was the name."

Hereupon the landlady volubly recounted to Mr. Foothorape the whole story of Marmaduke's elopement with Luciana Mary, adding, very likely, some dramatic adornments of her own. Mr. Foothorape listen-

ed with much interest, and required a second glass of whiskey, with two shreds of lemon peel, if she would be so kind, to keep up his nerves over this exciting story. It was really new to him. He had, in fact, expected to meet Marmaduke here, and to utilize him, as before. He was disappointed and rather irritated, and commented severely to the landlady, with more success than usual, on Marmaduke's conduct in betraying his employer's confidence. But Mr. Foothorape was relieved when the landlady added that the new young man came here mostly of evenings.

On hearing this, Mr. Foothorape again became philanthropical.

"Sometimes the plate-basket must be burdensome," he remarked. "A butler, or similar functionary, requires conversation, as his spoons do chamois-leather, to keep him

bright. I should like, ma'am, for old sake's sake," Mr. Foothorape said, rather vaguely, "to have a little conversation with Mr.—Mr.——"

"Villeroy's," the landlady said.

"Villeroy's new young man."

"I'll point him out to you, sir, when he comes in," the landlady said.

By this time the bold peasantry, their country's pride, were gathering to almost the only relaxation afforded them. They entered the bar with somewhat of a clownish and self-depreciatory appearance, and did not gain confidence at first sight of Mr. Foothorape, who looked portly and dignified, and calculated to overcome them. They displayed their embarrassment in various ways. This man, when he saw Mr. Foothorape, took off awkwardly a specimen of brown, weather-beaten head-gear, which,

it seemed, might, æons ago, have been a round wide-awake. Another's hulking gait became more hulking still. A third, who came in loquacious, sat down silent, and asked in a whisper for a cup of cider. Gazing stealthily on Mr. Foothorape, he spilt some of it over his already sufficiently-stained smock. Nor, when the frequenters of the bar were gathered together, and provided with such apologies for good beer and tobacco as their finances allowed, did their consternation seem to be diminished. They stared furtively, they hardly spoke—each was visibly troubled when Mr. Foothorape chanced to look his way—they nudged each other. One of these latter demonstrations commencing at one end of the row of sitters, who were pretty closely packed together on the wooden seat that ran round the bar, affected the whole of them; and the

last man who occupied the edge all but fell off, at which, for the first time, a few ventured on a half-suppressed laugh.

"Tummus looks as if a harnet 'ad stung him," observed the man who was usually garrulous. At which the laughter increased; and one member of the social gathering in particular, trying to suppress his mirth, gave vent to an extraordinary compromise between a cough and a chuckle, of a highly absurd character.

The garrulous man gained confidence, and addressed Mr. Foothorape.

"You'll excuse Tummus, zir, and all of us. These bean't regular Zummerzetshire manners; but we volk be frightened like; we think, zir, as you're a lawyer."

Mr. Foothorape hastened to deny this surmise, and added some remarks, agreeable, it seemed, to his audience, which in-

timated that he disliked lawyers, upon moral grounds.

After this, reserve comparatively vanished, and Mr. Foothorape, studying to make himself agreeable, succeeded. He induced Tummus, bashful still in consequence of his ignominious lapse, to sing a song. Tummus interpreted a pathetic ballad of his county, consisting of no more than twelve lines, which, because his tempo was at once precarious and protracted, was not finished in less than a quarter of an hour.

Mr. Foothorape loudly applauded, and himself afterwards obliged. Pauline even—sitting out the long evening alone in the parlour, wrapt in her own sombre meditations, and with a strange look in her eyes, that were fixed on the firelight—Pauline almost smiled when she heard her father's voice

rendering with manly fervour one of those songs which, praising honesty and sincerity, are heard with favour at the music halls, as it was by these yokels.

While Mr. Foothorape's song was being applauded by the scrunching of hobnails, the person whom Mr. Foothorape chiefly desired to meet entered, namely, Marmaduke's successor. Mr. Foothorape knew him by instinct, and made room for him, of which there was, by this time, none to spare—the youth sitting down with some diffidence by the side of the portly stranger. The former was of rustic extraction and breeding; and, after a little preliminary conversation, began to let fall what Mr. Foothorape wanted, as easily as fodder through a horse-rack, Mr. Foothorape representing the quadruped which derives benefit from the process.

Circumstances aided Mr. Foothorape's

designs, for the village cobbler was now entertaining them with a recitation of great length and profound interest; and, after him, Tummus was induced to play on the flageolet. Half an hour was spent in persuading him, which operation engrossed the attention of all; and during an equal space of time, Tummus performed upon the instrument. The strain was melancholy, and the manner of the performer was slow and uncertain; the instrumental efforts of Tummus, in fact, very much resembled those which he made as a vocalist.

Under cover, then, of the music, Mr. Foothorape, as he might have done in more polite society, carried on a long conversation. Marmaduke's successor was guileless, and, when drawn out, communicative. When he went, as he did earlier than any one else, supper at the Lodge, no doubt, de-

manding his presence, Mr. Foothorape was so much pleased at the information he had drawn from him, that he ordered another glass of whiskey, winking as he did so. In fact, he was by this time in a state to which you would have regretted to see so excellent a man reduced. He was drunk. Very slowly the bucolic sitters in the bar became aware of the fact, which rather, on the whole, relieved their feelings, inasmuch as they felt in a sort of way that the load of inferiority was lifted from off their minds.

It is not well for the interests of a conspiracy that a conspirator should be drunk; and possibly Mr. Foothorape might have published his scheme, and have left little more to be told concerning the Villeroys, but for an intervention which just now occurred. A girl, pale and handsome, though her face was somewhat worn, entered the bar and

stood in the midst, the Somersetshire clowns all rising as she entered. It was Pauline. She had come not because she was tired of the society of the half-shorn lambs on the mantelpiece; for she would have liked to sit brooding alone by the dying fire in the little parlour, into the deep November midnight, doing what she had been doing, thinking, with a strange calm at her heart, of the time before her fall.

Life is discord, but memory is music. And sweet, strangely, mockingly sweet, seemed to Pauline that far forgotten time. Such a time she could never, she knew, have again, "on this dull side of death"—and on the other—she looked into the red burning coals and trembled.

"What, I superstitious!" she said to herself. Then she tried to divert her thoughts, and remembering Mr. Foothorape had partaken

that day, with a view to screw his courage to the sticking-place, freely of stimulants, it suddenly struck her he was staying much too long in the bar. Hence her arrival. Mr. Foothorape was conversing with great fluency and affability when his daughter entered; but, at sight of her, he stopped like a guilty thing, and while he was shredding a slice of lemon, slightly cut one of his fat fingers.

"You must be tired," Pauline quietly said, giving him a look, which had at the moment a sobering influence; at least Mr. Foothorape understood it, for he stopped talking and rose.

"You are," he said, standing in the midst of the kitchen as uprightly as a tipsy man could, and dumbfoundering the farm labourers and small shopmen by this sudden change in the tone of his remarks—"You are,"

Mr. Foothorape exclaimed, "a set of cads and clodhoppers. Yes, cads and clodhoppers."

"Come," said Pauline; and he followed her, leaving the agricultural mind to digest the opinion of it expressed in these words.

Mr. Foothorape was, naturally, unable to acquaint Pauline with any discoveries he might have made during that evening, and was indeed persuaded to retire to rest with some difficulty; and then only upon the condition that a poached egg should be brought to his bedside. This was done, and Mr. Foothorape having calmly consumed the poached egg, lay down and slept. Pauline was apprehensive that, in the morning, he would have forgotten all that had passed; but though he had, when he came down to breakfast in the little parlour, no

recollection at all of the insult which he had offered to the peasantry of Somersetshire, he perfectly recollected his conversation with the Villeroys' servant. He had, indeed, gathered a good deal from the simple-minded retainer—a great deal more than he had anticipated. Fortune had favoured him. He had found that, this very next evening, Clare was purposing to visit an aunt of the new footman. Mr. Foothorape had professed a great interest in this aunt, and had been rewarded with a biographical memoir of her, an encomium on her virtues, and a statement of her ailments, of which it appeared that the chief one, at present, was rheumatics. Miss Clare, the poor young fellow said, with an honest tear in his eye, was kind to her, and took to her medicine and money, and read to her. Mr. Foothorape expressed his admiration of this conduct,

and said Miss Clare must have a dreary long walk of it these November mornings. She in general came back in the evenings, in the twilight time, the young fellow said; and some more indirect pressure from Mr. Foothorape elicited a description of the road from the Lodge to the more unpretending residence of the new footman's aunt.

This was the substance of what Mr. Foothorape found out from his unconscious interlocutor. And upon this information, Pauline and her father arranged their plans.

"This little old scrap of writing of Bell's, which you have kept, will be of service. It must be very old," Mr. Foothorape remarked, strengthening his tea with a table-spoonful of brandy.

"Yes," Pauline dreamily returned, smoothing it out, as she held the scrap of paper in

her hand. "It was blistered with tears, her own," she said to herself. "It must be very old," she went on aloud.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE WOOD.

WE have lost sight of Clare since she parted from Sir Bayard Beevor by the river-side. Leaving him regretfully, she went slowly up the knoll before mentioned, at the summit of which was the wood, clear of mist, a black mass just visible by reason of the wan moonlight that, when the drifting clouds were thinnest, hardly pierced them. It was not a very encouraging place to enter just now, this gloomy, dim plantation. Clare herself felt a wish that she were safe on the other side, when, opening

the gate, she began to force her way through the leaves that choked the two or three paths about it. The clouds rolled thicker over the moon when she reached the centre of the wood; then, all at once, and for the first time for nearly half an hour, opened, and showed the pale disk, and, close in front of her, so that she gave a slight shriek, Pauline's paler face. As if she had desired to produce a theatrical effect, Miss Foothorape stood erect and composed, with her hands folded in front of her, right in Clare's path; and, to make a grand comparison, the two girls stood opposite each other, like the bright Ithuriel and the wan, passion-marred mien of the lost archangel.

"Clare Vaughton, I think," Pauline said. "I fear I have startled you."

"Very little," Clare returned, recovering

herself with some effort, and smiling as she looked scrutinizingly into the other's face. "This is rather an odd time and place for meeting a stranger. May I ask——"

"It is a very odd time and a very odd place," Pauline interrupted. "But you may, perhaps, be glad to have seen me, when you have heard why I have chosen to stop you."

Clare did not know whether or not she might feel reassured as she looked at Pauline; for while the latter did not seem exactly of the way-laying or depredating sort, no pilfering gipsy, or nomad highwaywoman, there was something wild in her eyes when, in the fitful moonlight, Clare could see them. Was this some lunatic? she thought, meditating whether she had not better call out. Sir Bayard might not be out of hearing. And, indeed, if she had only known,

she might have put a good deal of additional difficulty in the way of carrying out the conspiracy now being worked against her; for Sir Bayard was just at the foot of the wood at that very moment, wandering to and fro about the long river meadows beneath, where the fog resisted the weak moonlight even to the reception of so much as a yellow tint.

"You know Bell Carteret?" Pauline abruptly asked, while this hurried hesitation passed through Clare's mind.

Clare's face flushed, and her frame trembled at this unexpected question, more than it had trembled with previous alarm.

"I do," she said at length.

"I have a message from him to you," and she held out her hand with a slip of paper.

"Which I cannot receive, and which I

am surprised at his sending," Clare returned, preparing to pass on. "But you have nothing round your neck this gloomy chilly night," Clare said, noticing that Pauline wore not even the smallest of scarves above her dress, which ended at the bottom of her throat. "Take this—I have two," and she unfastened the grey scarf Sir Bayard had noticed, and offered it to Pauline.

"It will make no difference," the latter said, with a strange smile. But she took it, and tied it round her throat, nevertheless, slowly, as not thinking of what she did. "I think," she went on, "that I have a better reason for hesitating to bring it than you for hesitating to read it. I am his wife!"

Clare's colour changed to white this time, and she went as pale as her rival; she shook and even tottered, her foot making a rustle among the fallen fir cones.

"Now!" exclaimed Pauline loudly, turning her head.

The figure of a heavy man sprang from behind two great boles at the side of the path. Clare was seized, while she was still trembling from the effects of the former shock; and the next instant a man, no other than the excellent Mr. Foothorape, was carrying her at the best of his speed along the wood-path—stumbling more than once over the heaps of leaves and cones.

Pauline remained, not following him. She stood still some five minutes, till all was silence again, and then you could have heard her heart beat in the wood. She placed her hand trembling down beneath the scarf Clare had given her, and drew out something. It glittered in a glimpse of the moon, and her eyes caught the gleams. As she was lifting the thing—the pistol her

father had given her—with the barrel opposite her heart, "Coward, after all," she said, returning the weapon to its place of concealment. "Some foolish women shudder when a pistol goes off. I dare not even look at one."

Her hand returned, as the light again hid itself, and again she drew the pistol forth, but, do what she would, her hand trembled, as she turned it to her heart once more. But the bravest man is he who conquers cowardice, and with the perverted virtue that was her characteristic, Pauline pulled the trigger.

The report rang through the muffling wood, and clearer over the meadows and river below; and the peasants taking their dull carouse at the little inn, and just now stolidly and slowly discussing Pauline herself, heard the shot, and attributed it to

poachers, adding a hope that the woodcock which they presumed to be its object was lost to the lord of the manor.

"It hardly sounds like a goon," the loquacious man said, "but a poarcher should poarch wi' a goon as wunna mak much noise like."

Meanwhile Pauline lay writhing on the red fallen leaves. Her hand had trembled so that she had failed of part of her intent, and, instead of the shot through the heart which brings instantaneous death, she had wounded the left lung just above it—mortally.

She was thus, as has before been related, discovered by Sir Bayard Beevor, and was at first supposed by him to be Clare, from the accident of the scarf, and the sufficient resemblance which the figures of the two girls had, in the dim light, to be compared with

each other. Looking closer, the Baronet, of course, discovered his mistake, and was not sorry to change his agony for mere proper attention. He knelt down among the russet leaves, and tried to stop the blood with his handkerchief, and even with his coat, which he took off when the rushing stream saturated the handkerchief in a few minutes. And all the time he was calling as loudly as he could for assistance. This at length came through different parts of the wood—a farm servant going home from the inn where Mr. Foothorape had lodged; the ostler at the Wheatear; and, fortunately as it might have been, indifferently as it was, Mr. Thring, the doctor, who happened to be quitting the house of a patient at an outskirt of the village, over which the wood almost threw its shadow. So these four lifting Pauline (after Mr. Thring had ex-

amined the wound, and stopped it with some lint he had by him), bore her down through the wood to the Wheatear, very slowly, of course; the ostler leading the way by means of a lantern he had luckily brought with him. It was an event they remembered in after days, these four men—this bearing of a suicide with a slowness that was terrible, while the November night hung gloomy all above them, silent, with its vapours that conquered the dim occasional moonlight—bearing it through the dusk wood, and by the darker river. However, they reached the Wheatear at last. And, rumour being slower at Collington than elsewhere, they met with no impediment as they made their way through the passage and up the staircase, and laid their burden in the first room on the landing.

"It's not the best bed," the landlady

thought to herself as she very carefully, and with really true interest, arranged the pillows, "not by three."

Pauline had panted fearfully as they carried her, and all likelihood of her speaking again, indeed of her doing anything but die in a few minutes, had seemed small enough. But when she was laid on the bed Mr. Thring contrived to stop the hemorrhage for a time at least. At first Pauline, looking at him with as much anger as her eyes could now express, made a feeble attempt to tear off the bandages. But presently, the styptics being still successful in stopping the blood, her eyes changed their expression somewhat, and grew softer. She looked towards the curate, who had been sent for and had arrived, and she pointed to Mr. Thring, and twice to Sir Bayard.

"Let them stay," she said. Mr. Thring

forbade her to speak, but she persisted; and at last he gave leave, and, obeying her sign, the landlady, and other members of the establishment, much against their will, left the room, although Pauline with great difficulty confessed, in a few cleverly-chosen disjointed words, the plot she and her father had executed. It appeared that Mr. Foothorape was at this moment careering in a gig towards Cliffborough, with Clare Vaughton, made insensible by the occasional administration of a opiate, at his side; the intention of the adventurous Mr. Foothorape being to get Clare on board a small vessel, take her out to sea, and there put in practice the intention which he, not unsuccessfully, had practised before, as we know, in this very village. The other parts of this desperate scheme which Pauline confessed may be inferred. With the last words of

her declaration, the blood burst forth over bandage and styptic, and, with a few more quick distressing pantings, Pauline died.

Sir Bayard did not wait for her last breath. Before the life was out of her, the traces were being hooked in the yard of the Wheatear, and Sir Bayard's impatient foot was on the step of the vehicle that was to pursue Mr. Foothorape. He might have overtaken him sooner on a roadster, but Sir Bayard remembered his own difficulties, and reluctantly contented himself with the vehicle, preferring a mode of pursuit over which he had some control.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR BAYARD PURSUES.

SIR BAYARD pursued the fugitives at great speed; but not very many miles divide Collington from Cliffborough, and though he made no mistake along the dark road, he did not overtake them. About an hour before midnight he reached the first lamps, and, presently, the whitechapel was flinging up an extra amount of wet and mud, as, at some risk, it dashed along the narrow ways that skirt the quays of the Avon. There was only just light enough to trace

the black water of the river, and to mark the sloops and barges here and there anchored.

At the first quay from which it was likely that a seaworthy vessel could start, Sir Bayard stopped, threw the rein to a lad who had accompanied him from the Wheatear, and entered a decked barge which was moored to the side, up and down which, discoverable by a lantern, a watchman was pacing. Sir Bayard went up to him, and put some hurried inquires. But the watchman was dull of comprehension, and slow of speech, and ten minutes or a quarter of an hour passed before Sir Bayard ascertaied that the watchman had neither seen nor heard anything, which, as this was the first on the line of quays to be passed on the road from Collington, was clearly discouraging. Sir Bayard, however, trusted

that the watchman either was preternaturally stupid, or had been drowsy, and hastening from the barge he re-entered his vehicle, and drove to the next quay. As he came close upon it, he perceived, passing slowly up the quay, two points of fire, and his heart bounded with expectation, for these were the lights of two pipes; and any movement on the quay at so late a time indicated, Sir Bayard thought, some hope of the success of his search. He sprang down long before his horse stopped, and ran up to the smokers. They were a couple of rough fellows, one old and the other young; the first red, broad and grizzled, the second red, not quite so broad, and not at all grizzled; both, by reason of their loose shabby seamen's dress, and their straight landsman's walk, of an amphibious appearance, evidently father and son.

They seemed reluctant somewhat at first to answer the Baronet's rapid inquiries; but their very reluctance increased his hope that he had hit on the track, and he mentioned that they would receive a considerable reward should their information lead to anything like a satisfactory result.

At this piece of news the pipes simultaneously were removed from the mouths, and Sir Bayard very soon gathered that a large open sailing-boat had been hired some three hours ago, by a man whom Sir Bayard could not identify, for, in the hurry of departure, he had forgotten to find out what style of manly beauty had the honour of being Mr. Foothorape's.

"The lady, the lady!" Sir Bayard said. "Describe her."

"She was mad, I reckon," said the oldest of the two. "She looked a'most crazed,

and mazed, and dazed. He told us he wor a doctor, and she'd escaped from one o' them big places, and he must get her back again to it, at Cardiff. He told us as she fancied hersen one o' them things as creeps along plots o' ground."

"A vegetable marrow," the son explained. "She was a fine young lady, too, half asleep; but she opened her eyes, and they were large and grey."

"Did you let them go alone in the boat at this time of night?" the Baronet said, sharply.

"Why, governor," the old man returned, "if a gent comes to hire our boat, we asks no questions, if he stumps down. Who is there in the world as does, when money's offered 'em? And them as takes queer coves' money, and sets up their backs like so many porcipines agin queer coves, is many on 'em

better able to afford to be partikler about this bisniss than I am."

"Well," Sir Bayard said, cutting short the old man's sententiousness, "have you got another sailing-boat—and will your son go out with me to hunt this scoundrel down? The young lady is not mad, and the affair is a vile abduction!"

At this moment the chimes rang out all over Cliffborough, beginning from the great church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and the clocks struck midnight.

"Harkye," said the younger of the boatmen, putting his great hand to his ear. "Whatever's that?—somebody galloping alongside river! Mortal glad he inna me!" Sir Bayard and the older boatman listened, and heard coming toward them the swift beat of the hoofs of a galloping horse. Nearer and nearer; louder and louder. No

pause on the somewhat dangerous road; and now the horse was close on them.

Its rider stopped and dismounted, and came up to them with his arm through his bridle. Sir Bayard looked. He saw in the very dim light a tall, lightly-built young man, pale and sad of face, yet withal well-looking, as especially most women might have judged.

The stranger lifted his hat.

"I am one of the Villeroys—Bell Villeroy. I have ridden from Collington after you, being deputed in lieu of Baker, who is less eager than I am for this lady to be recovered, and this scoundrel to be overtaken. I cannot easily prove to you that I am the man I state myself to be," Bell said; "but——"

"Thank you," Sir Bayard said, holding out his hand frankly. "I know a gentle-

man when I see him. Do you happen to know how to manage a boat, how to luff and to belay, and all that sort of thing? We should be overloaded with three, I think."

"I think I shall prove a sufficiently good amateur—at all events, for such a calm night as this. I learnt my seamanship on different waters—round Skye, and the wild coast of Glenelg."

"And you know this Channel?"

"I've sailed a boat down it twice, and it's not difficult," Bell said.

"You've not the remotest notion where he's likely to be making for?" the Baronet said. "Not for Cardiff, of course, for he mentioned it."

"I should say for the open sea," Bell returned. "I fancy, if I read Miss Vaughton aright, he will not have extorted from her

the signature of a cheque which I understand he wants, before he is out of the Channel."

"Nor then," Sir Bayard observed, feeling curiosity and jealousy for the first time when he discovered the interest Bell took in Clare's character. A rumour he had heard respecting some one whose name was like Bell's recurred to his memory—Bell—Bell—but the name was Bell Carteret, he thought.

But by this time Bell had entered the boat, which was being prepared, hastily, by the two boatmen, committing now his horse to the care of the youngest.

"I reckon, gents," said the old man, "as we'll tow yer down again, as we towed t'other—that's why we're here, 'avin' just brought the boat back again. You'll take care on the boat—she's a sarsy little ship.

You won't need no rudder after you get outside Portishead. What wind there is, is dead down Channel. Only take care of them two Holmses; an' I hope as you'll overtak' 'em, gents; but it ain't often in this world," observed the ancient mariner, unconsciously contradicting Horace, "as justice cotches a clever raskull——"

"You need not have more than one man in the tow-boat, I suppose?" Bell said, interrupting him.

"We maun ha' two, or more," the older wharfsman said.

"If your son will take this," and Bell showed an enveloped letter, "to the superintendent of the Cliffborough police, and will take it at once, while you tow us down, you shall have liberal pay for that one service, at any rate."

And Bell produced his purse, and offered

an inducement which prevailed on the boatmen to alter their minds. The younger went quickly off with the letter; the elder got into the towing-boat, and it, with the sailing vessel, was soon out on the tide.

Their boat was towed at first for several miles, and the two young men had plenty of opportunity for conversation as they trailed slowly down between the high banks that enclose the narrow Avon. Bell informed Sir Bayard that he had arrived at Collington by the late train that very evening, and without the slightest idea of the very remarkable events occurring in the village, had made his way to the Wheatear, with the intention of lodging there that evening. He had found the commotion at its height—Mr. Villeroy in wild agitation—Baker on the point, with manifest reluctance, of taking horse in pursuit.

"I know Miss Vaughton well enough to feel an interest in her," Bell said, "and I'm here to represent the family in place of Baker, whom I left pulling off his leggings with much rapidity. I do not know why you are in pursuit—whether there is any special reason—perhaps it is impertinent almost in me to ask for one; but still, taking Mr. Villeroy's place—" Bell said here, with clear hesitation and forced calmness.

"I am here," the Baronet returned, "because in some respects I am a fool. I pursue Miss Vaughton, but she flies from me, voluntarily as well as involuntarily."

"Then ours," said Bell, much relieved in mind, "is simply an honourable rivalry."

"If you have no more to fear from any other rival than you have from me," Sir Bayard remarked, "your happiness is complete, if we once board that rascal Footho-

rape. There is no person on earth on whose account Miss Vaughton is so profoundly indifferent as on mine. She regards me as a brother."

"Well," Bell said half musingly, "I should almost be content to have her regard me even so dearly. Not to lose sight of her, ever to guard her, to have her sweet counsel always till the brief weary dark journey, dark almost as this dreary night, is done, and we stand together in the great white light, and hear the song sweeter than any earthly song, and lasting for ever—this would be almost enough."

"You are in the sentimental way, I see," Sir Bayard remarked. "So am I sometimes, but I shut up my better feelings with a proper English contempt for them. Do you often go on in this style? It is quite a relief to hear it; one is tired to hear every-

body always making the worst of themselves."

"I don't know what moved me," Bell said. "I am generally cynical enough; but sometimes cynicism relieves itself with sentiment, and I am trying to get rid of my superfluous cynicism."

"That old fellow is taking off," the Baronet said, referring to the towing-boat. "Will you set the big sail? I suppose we must tack, or do something. Can I do anything?"

"Presently, if you will watch me," Bell said with a slight laugh. "Just now you had better lie down full length in the bottom of the boat, or I may hit you with the yard."

CHAPTER X.

DOWN CHANNEL.

THEY had now been on the water some hours, but the long winter night gave no signs of ending, except that by growing darker it might seem to intimate the period immediately preceding dawn. Only by the increase on the rise and fall of the boat they knew they were approaching the open channel, though they were rocked hardly at all, for the night was as quiet as it was sullen. They could not even observe now that either bank of the broadening river receded. The sad, silent moon, that had seemed as though

she was some mourner with tear-dimmed eyes, who would not leave the grave of Autumn, had at last disappeared, and with the falling breeze the rack no longer drifted over the sky, but had settled into an opaque universal cloud, that moved no more than the dome above it. Only, right in front of him, Bell saw the distant red glimmer of the Flatholms lighthouse, and made his point for it, which he could do easily enough, for such failing breeze as there was, was favourable.

"I am glad, for her sake, the night is so calm," Bell said, sitting down, when he had set the sail, on the lee side of the boat, and turning towards his companion rather by guess-work than actual sight; for, small as the boat was, certainly one person in the bows could not have seen just now another in the stern.

From the helm the voice of the Baronet replied rather forlornly—"For my sake, if I only were concerned, I feel as if I should like the night to be very rough indeed."

"Some people would feel there was danger enough," Bell returned. "A small boat, a wide sea, a night as black as Pluto's profound, and your pilot a stranger and an amateur."

"Yes," Sir Bayard said, "I don't deny that I feel the awe of the situation. But we are careering along, and wherever there's excitement it counteracts fear. Yet one would like a star or two."

"The fear of the divine is present on the sea, the love on the land," Bell said. "One wonders how the Greeks could ever have dreamt that Aphrodite, their laughing, pleasure-loving goddess, rose from the sea."

"She is cruel as the sea," Sir Bayard said.

"She has some characteristics of it, certainly," Bell remarked. "But whatever pleasure the sea has is foreign to the pleasure of love—at least, of Greek love. The joy of the sea is a Norseman's, and not a Greek's."

"You seem to have ideas in your head," Sir Bayard remarked, "which is a relief and a variety. I have ideas too occasionally, by way of a change, but I can't express them. Why is it so?"

"Assuming the truth of what you say of yourself," Bell returned, "I take it that the reason lies here. Thought can never express more than half of itself, so to speak. There must be an overflow of idea before there is a sufficiency of expression. A poet, for instance,—many others may have felt as

much as he expresses, but not as much as he has felt, and therefore their power of expression, falling short in proportion—turn the helm a little more to the left—is not enough to make them poets. This explains why so many people feel themselves equal in mind to this or to that author, and wonder why they cannot do what he can, and sometimes make, in the effort to do it, injudicious exhibitions of themselves. Often their feeling was true, but they did not know that an author is greater than his book."

"Well," said Sir Bayard, "I shall escape that danger, at all events, I am not going to be an author, but," here he hesitated a little —"but—you would laugh if you knew me better—I have some idea of being a clergyman. I have had grave long thoughts often lately, and I am repentant of the frivolities,

and worse than frivolities of my former life. You believe in Christianity?"

"I think," Bell returned, "that the conclusions regarding human nature, upon which Christianity, argumentatively speaking, is chiefly based ('evidences,' as the term is, being buttresses rather than bases), are true. That is to say, from my observation of myself and others, from such truth as may be gathered from history, from some study, in short, of human nature, I think that man, if he stand by himself, must fall. At least, I know I should fall, did I stand by myself. This little boat may sail bravely enough in fair weather, but in a storm its chance would be poor enough, yet not so poor as self-reliant man encountering the strength and the sweetness of temptation. And this is no dogma, but a truth divine—felt in his own heart by every one."

"You see," Sir Bayard said, after a brief pause, "of course—I am afraid if you knew me better you would laugh—of course I should preach. Now, how am I to preach? —because it has always seemed to me that preaching does as much harm as good."

"It's a very perplexing question," Bell returned. "For the style of sermon which suits a thoughtful, religious man, is not, in my opinion, likely to make thoughtful religious men of those who as yet are not such. Strong meat is not for infants. There is an education in religion, and it seems to me worse than useless to address those who are out of the pale as if they had felt every feeling recorded in the Pilgrim's Progress."

"You mean, I suppose," Sir Bayard said, "that you think it injudicious for a preacher to lay so much stress on the spiritual side of religion."

"Without denying the spiritualness of religion, affirming it rather, I do," Bell returned. "I should appeal to the natural noble side of nature, and prove, as I could prove, that nature could not be consistently noble, without the aid which, as I believe, was given by that supreme moment upon Calvary. So preaching, I should appeal to sympathetic ears."

"This is the greatest and most enlightened of the centuries," Sir Bayard said, "and the most sceptical."

"Is this century better than others in higher matters?" Bell asked, in the somewhat austere spirit, which was yet blended with a not ungenial character. "Has it shown that it can do without Christianity? How much blood has cried to heaven from the ground betwixt the morning of Austerlitz and the evening of Woerth?"

"Science and study, generally, show a tendency to doubt," the Baronet resumed, his chief object being, perhaps, to draw Bell out.

"As the author of Hypsipyle writes:

> 'For to him who fails to take the world for his study,
> Books are wandering lights that lead him wide in the marish,'"

Bell said. "I have no sympathy with these secularists. They know in their own hearts they are wrong. This scepticism is but one form of many names, taking a new name about once a century. Comtism, for instance, is as old as Christianity. Your Comtist may be nobler in profession than your Christian—for, after all, Christianity is the easiest of reforms. Fielding I think it is, who hints that the Comtists of his century—I don't care for names—had a tendency to run away with their neighbours' wives. And

Fielding understood human nature. There is," Bell went on, "a grandeur and a glory about these systems. So one comet after another brings the same alarm, the same admiration, the same splendour, and the same danger. But we will not cross the street to see this quaint, regular, evenly grand and glorious sun. We are indifferent to Christianity, the best of us."

"I wonder you are not a clergyman yourself," Sir Bayard observed.

"I am too hopeless of the world," Bell said. "Perhaps I am wrong. But I cannot feel that I can mend it."

"I think you are wrong," Sir Bayard returned.

"I think I am, myself," Bell said. "But don't deceive yourself, and think that the world is better than it was. Superficially it may be. But if a great occasion of kind-

ling the passions should arise, the passions would be kindled, and it would be in England, as Thucydides says when a like conflagration broke forth, as it was in Greece. But—yonder is the glimmer of dawn."

Sir Bayard looked eastward eagerly. There, the grey universal cloud was growing a lighter grey. The light spread, the water about their swiftly speeding boat began to be visible, farther still, and wider. They could see each other now, and strained, both of them, eager eyes to catch a sight of the desired sail.

But the few boats that one after the other came into sight, were all clearly fishing smacks, too large for the object of their search. Meanwhile, a tinge of gold overlined the east—and presently the clouds broke and disclosed the rising sun. He shone soon in power through the morning,

and glorified the poor streets of Cardiff, past which they were now sailing, with his kind, unheeded splendour.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. FOOTHORAPE'S FAREWELL.

THAT two young gentlemen, pursuing a young lady with whom they are both in love, and about whose fate they are in a terrible suspense, should meanwhile discuss theological points, may seem unnatural to the reader, or, at least, may be pointed out to him as being so by the reviewer, and very likely will be. And that young or old gentlemen, or young or old ladies, should discuss theological points at all, may seem improper to as many as think that novels should be made up of nonsense.

As to the last objection I shall merely remark that, sense or nonsense, novels are harder to write, at least to write well, than your superfine critics affect to think. Like sermons, they are much reviled; like sermons, the composition of them is very much more difficult than is supposed,—more difficult than the criticism. For the first objection, it may hold good with people who have never watched themselves, and do not know that the mind, when on the strain, flies willingly to a temporary relief, who reject Walter Scott's assertion:

> "Such inconsistent moods have we,
> Even when our passions strikes the key;"

or who do not realize how thought, more solemn than of anything that is transitory, would be likely to invade the minds of two voyagers tossed blindly, and hid altogether

under the length and strength of night on the broad black rolling sea-water.

As for Bell Villeroy's views, possibly he may not express them in a manner the most palatable to some. Characteristically. But it is a comfort to find a young man in these days who does not profess to think Christianity a myth, or something feebler. Every youth who has a smattering of knowledge and a sparkle of cleverness, will put you down the religion of Newton and Milton, condemning it for its very adaptation to that human nature which is always the same, and which, of course, young men have so deeply studied and so thoroughly learnt.

However, the morning had broken at last, and the sun had risen with more of warmth and brightness than its November wont. Eagerly, as has been said, the two young men strained their eyes, the Baronet through

his eyeglass, over the water; but in vain, and equally to no purpose. They hailed the first fishing boat, in which the men hardly paused from their work of emptying the trawls, to render an answer. Yet now the prospect was wide enough. Cardiff, along its roads, and the Welsh coast cut off short to the south, glittered in the morning sun, and the pale far blue was visible of the hills of Glamorgan. Light touched the water, more and more increasing eastward as they sailed on; and first the red hill of Clevedon showed its villas, and then the terraces of larger Weston rose distinct with an earlier hope of the sun, that already changed, momentarily, the hues of the bulk that ends the sweeping Somerset coast, blue southern Minehead. Very soon a steamer came in sight, rounding the near promontory on the Welsh side; and before another half

hour had passed, Bell had run alongside, and Sir Bayard was on the steamer's deck. But he could get no news; and, indeed, in the profound darkness of the night that had just ended, it was likely enough that the boat containing Clare and Mr. Foothorape had been met and passed without notice. Sir Bayard bought a small telescope from a sailor on board, and the slide was just being removed for him to go down, when the same sailor (the Baronet had made his inquiries from the captain) observed that as he "wor keeping watch last night, towards morning, he heard a singlar thing, as them as was ignorant might have thought was a mermaid."

"What was it?" Sir Bayard said, with all impatience.

The man's answer made the Baronet's eyes flash, and his lips grow straight.

It was a woman's cry, or rather the man thought he had heard one about two hours ago right down Channel. He had listened again, but no repetition of the outcry had reached his ear; and for ten minutes afterwards he had thought it was fancy, inasmuch as he, on his own showing, disdained to be classed among the superstitious. But, afterwards, he had thought it was a shout or cry—it was hardly a shriek, he said, and not a fancy; and this last idea, he added, while Sir Baynard went hastily down the ladder, had clung to him, somewhat to his discomfort.

Bell's lips closed sternly too, when Sir Bayard told what he had to tell, much agitated, while the other's face merely grew paler.

"I wish we'd a sprit-sail," he said, looking to the bowsprit; "but we're going faster."

And, indeed, they soon made up the way they had lost by hanging on to the homeward-bound steamer; and, looking out to sea, the white foam crests, which as yet the undulation had been too insignificant to raise, began here and there to appear. The fallen wind was again freshening; the boat leapt more quickly on, with a motion free and swift enough to suit the eager spirits of the voyagers.

The two islets that rise in the inner reach of the Channel were now left far behind; and the boat was abreast of the fair, quiet bay of Cheve, and the soft, woody Quantock hills. The promontory of Minehead changed now from grey and blue to green; and presently they careered by its base and flanks, bronzed with the fading of the fern. And now the Welsh coast, trending off abruptly, grew distant and doubt-

ful, and the short-dropping waves changed to long triple-crested rollers.

For far away, over many a long wave, and many a leaping white foam-crest, Bell's eye rested on a line it instinctively chose for the first glimpse of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, the waves were rising much more quickly than could be accounted for by the broadening of the Channel.

"Will it be a storm?" Sir Bayard said.

"Something like it," Bell returned. "Those clouds will come up less heavy than they look now; but they are charged with rain and wind, and with wind that will blow for some time. They are from the north-west, and it often blows from the north-west at this time of the year. You don't want to be put on shore, I suppose, while she is on the water?"

"I don't suppose my chivalry will be of

so much profit to me as yours to you," Sir Bayard said, a little ruefully. "But, for all that, I will go on with my lesson in seamanship, if you please."

By this time the gulls that had flown plentifully about them grew few, and at last none. The waves rapidly rose, the sun went altogether into cloud, the morning grew really windy, and the boat rose and dipped quite as much as was safe for so small a vessel. But through rising wind and wave, and flying spray, and gathering tempest, Bell, with his hand on the sail-rope now, and now relieving Sir Bayard at the helm, but with his resolute eyes strained ever out to sea, sailed his boat intrepidly on.

But soon an obstacle occurred which he dreaded more than the perilous rising of the waters. The rain began, and came down in

sheets of so thick a driving mist, that his view became as much circumscribed, almost, as it had been during the darkness of the night. Also, if I may venture on so realistic a statement, Sir Bayard, about this time, being pretty nearly as unaccustomed to navigation as he was to horsemanship, became an invalid; though he did as much work as he could, manfully, in the midst of his agonies.

The weather grew hard, apace. Half an hour ago the length and breadth of the Channel had been visible, the waves, and the gulls' wings dashing over them, gleaming in the morning sun, the red sails of the home-returning fishing-boats spread to the full, the shores stretching bright and pleasant, here and there a blue isle or promontory, a dozen white glittering towns and hamlets, and, faint and far, or full and

near, the purple of a hundred hills. But now the struggling boat drove on, with a reefed sail, through a great rushing blank of mist and rain; and all the fair scene of half an hour ago seemed fabulous and forgotten. As for putting in now, it could not have been done, even had not both Bell and Sir Bayard been fiercely bent on following the villain Foothorape while there was a plank between them and the hungry water. For it could not; and as the waves ran with them, it was even safer to run on down the Channel; for had they turned aside, they must have encountered cross seas, to the imminent peril of their already enough endangered boat. Further, Bell had made up his mind that Mr. Foothorape had not put in yet. He pictured him and Clare, with how fair and resolute, but how despairing a face, dashing on some few miles in front of

them, drenched, as they themselves were, by the rush of the spray, and hid, as they were, in the core of that great, league-broad, roaring tumult of wind and rain and water.

For Bell had made up his mind as to Foothorape's design. He had concluded that the latter's object was, as soon as possible, to extort from Clare some credential for a large sum of money; that he would not wrest his point either soon or easily from a girl of Clare's spirit; that he would stick to the open sea till he either got what he wanted, or—Bell shuddered at the other possibilities which suggested themselves.

During the night Foothorape had preferred, Bell concluded, to carry out his aim; for in the daylight Clare, of course, might more easily draw the notice of a passing ship or boat. And then again Bell thought that

Foothorape's probable plan had been to land Clare, after extorting from her his requirement, rather than rid himself of her in a darker way. From what he knew of Foothorape, he imagined that his once putative father-in-law was much too well educated to perpetrate unnecessary crimes. Therefore Bell followed what he regarded the probable course of the vessel he was pursuing, and drove on through the wild dark weather, resolutely down mid-channel.

For several hours the gale and storm continued, though, fortunately for various personages of this story, never rising to the height of tempest.

Sir Bayard, in spite of himself, was beginning to grow weary of his hard night and morning's work, and almost slept at the helm. Bell felt fatigue too, and his heart began to sink within him, while, hour after

hour, the misty stormy weather would not give way. It did not grow worse, however, after a certain point; and at length Bell, attentively watching as he held the helm—Sir Bayard by this time was actually asleep—thought the vapour driving around him was becoming thinner. He looked again—certainly it was. Slowly at first the change was perceptible, then rapidly, and soon there was such a swift clearance as befalls when, among mountains, the sun scatters the clouds of summer that had fallen to their summits.

To the sea, however, this November day, the sun did not return. When the morning's descent of vapour had cleared off upwards, the wind had fallen again, and the waves were falling already. Bell Villeroy, who for several hours had been in some doubt as to his actual position, was gratified

to find that he had taken the course he designed.

Before him, great and grey, and sober in colour, everywhere was spread the heaving Atlantic. He was well away from land, yet not so far off but he could see the black, pointed, shore-lining rocks, and knew that it was the coast of Devon which lay to the left. But he chiefly directed his eyes to an object which rose at some distance right out in front of him. It was the grey bulk of a small, somewhat hilly island, standing up alone, clear out in the ocean."

"Lundy Island," he said to himself. "I have come right, to a miracle."

For Bell, in default of better ground, had trusted a little to guess-work in this matter. It has before been stated that he had arrived at certain conclusions as to the probable proceedings of Mr. Foothorape, after his

embarkation; and he had hazarded a guess that Lundy Island, from its remote situation, would be the spot at which Mr. Foothorape, defeated or successful, would be not unlikely to set Clare upon shore—or, perhaps, to perform the same office for himself, and to leave her drifting. Sir Bayard, stretched along a thwart, still slept; Bell, with one hand on the helm, with the other gently withdrew from his companion's hand the pocket-glass the latter had bought on the steamer, and looked through it for a moment, and no more, for he instantly all but dropped it, with an exclamation which woke the tired-out Baronet.

Sir Bayard sprang up. Bell hurriedly gave him the glass, saying, with more excitement than he had yet shown,

"I can see them without it."

"Them?" the Baronet said, putting down the telescope he was lifting.

"Yes," Bell continued, in tones he could hardly keep cool. And he pointed with his disengaged hand. "As surely as that is Lundy Island which lies before us, there, between us and it, is the boat we are following."

"How do you know?—is she there?" the Baronet asked hastily, "my eyes are not as good as yours."

"There are two—I could see so much," returned Bell. "Would you work the helm? Our boat has been the faster of the two." And he rose and took in the reef of the sail.

Not only had their boat been, fortunately, the faster of the two, but it still kept its advantage. Therefore, while the cliffs of Lundy quickly grew nearer and larger, and lost their distant tint, and showed, instead, their

peculiar one of red felspar, the pursuer came up with the pursued, hand over hand. Even Sir Bayard could see now that there were two figures in the pursued boat, and Bell, looking through the glass, stamped his foot with an almost fierce joy when he began to perceive that one of them was light and slight, and a woman's.

"It is she—it is Clare!" he said to Sir Bayard, "standing by herself in the fore part of the boat." And very soon, as the boat still gained, positive identification succeeded instinct.

Evidently, too, about this time, she also perceived them, making a gesture of recognition, and that not a hurried, but a deliberate one, with one hand; with the other, Bell soon perceived, she was menacing a man in the stern sheets, who must be Mr. Foothorape.

When she recognised them, and, from motives of prudence, not before, Bell and Sir Bayard dared to make themselves known by signs of a more marked character than hers had been. Both waved their caps, and Sir Bayard shouted; but, swiftly as they were coming up over the now quietly heaving waves, he was not yet quite within speaking-distance.

"We shall be alongside in ten minutes more," Bell said, turning to the Baronet. "Steer to the left a little. That scoundrel will run on an edge presently. Lucky the tide's out; he's not two hundred yards from the shore."

"And when we are alongside," suggested Sir Bayard, "I must say I don't exactly see how we're to get at him then. He won't run aground. Do you feel prepared to do the acrobatic between one boat and the

other? I would if I could," Sir Bayard said, looking doubtfully at the still tossing waves; "but I don't think I can jump from one boat to the other, both jumping different ways, and with a very uncertain sort of interval."

"We shall manage it somehow," Bell said in reply to these remarks of Sir Bayard, in a very breathless manner. "Do you see his face? What a coward the scoundrel looks!"

Mr. Foothorape had been for some time fully conscious of pursuit and pursuers, and just now his face, with the trembling marks of fear upon it, and of fury too, now looking back at them from the helm, the next moment forward at Clare in the bows, was a study. But Mr. Foothorape, though a coward, was, nevertheless, a clever fellow. And, seeing that, even if he could beach his boat

safely, he was at the mercy of his pursuers, and that his game was up, he suddenly, when they were within fifty yards of them, tried another plan, one of two which occurred to him on the moment. The first was to threaten to take Clare's life unless the pursuers would make terms with him. For within the last few minutes Clare had made this practicable. Overcome at last by her great and long dangers, she had fainted, and lay, with the great wild eyes closed that had fixed themselves so eagerly upon Bell, prostrate in the fore-part of the boat, her pale face hid with the masses of her drenched, disordered hair, and by her side a pistol—just such an one as the pretty toy which had given death to Pauline; its fellow had given, perhaps, life to her. Bell saw her fall back, and almost leapt into the sea in his eagerness.

Meanwhile, Mr. Foothorape, as coolly as he could, decided between his two plans, and abandoning the first, chose the second —that is to say, when his pursuers were close upon him, and Bell already preparing himself for the spring, about which Sir Bayard hesitated, Mr. Foothorape shifted his sail with expertness, gave his rudder a great twist, and succeeded in sending his boat off upon an opposite tack, right away from shore, being now not forty yards therefrom. And then he quietly vaulted over the landward side of the boat into the water, and swam for dear life to the island.

It would have amused Bell and the Baronet at any other moment to see the portly Foothorape emerge from wave after wave, swimming well, but evidently in such difficulties as those by which the Trojan tar roused mirth of yore in Sicily. Bell, of

course, watched Mr. Foothorape's manœuvre, and, so doing, brought his boat alongside of the other in a few minutes. Unopposed, he had little difficulty in springing from one boat to the other; and hastening to Clare, found her already recovering her senses, and trying to rise in the boat. The Baronet was fully occupied with his rudder, which wore well, or he might have been pained to see the sudden gleam of content with which Clare's opening eyes rested on Bell as he raised her, now all the peril was over. We cannot at a moment's notice act in the face of great occasions, and Clare probably suspected the truth of Pauline's late assertion; so Bell, as his arm, raising her, supported Clare, felt pleasure after long, long weary pain. Her eyes betrayed her.

They landed as soon as possible, and obtained such accommodation as the island

could offer, omitting to try to hunt down the fugitive Foothorape. Clare gave such an account as might have been expected. She remembered little or nothing of what had occurred between the times of her being seized in the wood, and finding herself out under the dark sky at sea—at least, she remembered only rapid motion, and voices, as one might remember a dream. While they voyaged under the calm dark night down the Bristol Channel, Mr. Foothorape had suggested the draft of a cheque in his favour for the modest sum of ten thousand pounds. He had expatiated on the honourable nature of Clare, and had pointed out how affecting a proof of his confidence was this trifling act of violence to which he had resorted. A dishonourable person—a person who was merely bound by ignoble law, Mr. Foothorape had

remarked, might consider an extorted promise no promise; but Miss Vaughton was a lady, and a promise was a promise (it may be recalled that this was a favourite moral sentiment of Mr. Foothorape's). Therefore, Mr. Foothorape pointed out, he had relied on her honourable feeling. He had, he said, pen, ink, and paper secured in a waterproof case, and when the night grew a little less dark, he would produce them; and on Miss Vaughton writing a cheque, and giving her honour not to invalidate it in any way, he would land her at Cardiff, where there were some excellent hotels, and, no doubt, night porters.

Clare refused to accede, and seeing a glittering object in the dim light lying by Mr. Foothorape, as he sat on a thwart of the boat, she swiftly stepped forward, saw it was a pistol, snatched it up, and defied

him; and thus, by a little bit of incautiousness, was Mr. Foothorape defeated.

Undauntedly, and struggling against the additional weariness caused by the opiates, Clare, during the whole desperate voyage down channel, made Mr. Foothorape keep his distance by means of the weapon which he had intended to use himself—we will not conjecture how. And thus, and perhaps thus only, she escaped.

After spending some hours in rest, and rehabilitating themselves in all ways as well as they could on the island, Clare and Bell succeeded in being taken aboard by a passing steamer, and returned by it to Cliffborough. The Baronet was urged, especially by Clare, to accompany them. But he declined.

"I may as well take another lesson," he said, "in navigation."

Clare's face wore a mournful look when she parted from him, and for some time afterwards. She and Bell watched him sailing off from the island, over a sea once more comparatively calm, in the boat in which he and Bell had had so stormy yet so successful a voyage. He was accompanied by some Lundy fishermen, and by the other boat.

As for Mr. Foothorape, he was not pursued, it being conjectured that he had too much start, and Clare for the time being engrossing the minds of Sir Bayard and Bell. He was never heard of again by any of the three; but one local paper, which neither of them chanced to see, contained, about a week afterwards, the following paragraph:

"Fortunate Rescue.—A few days ago a German vessel which touched here, and then proceeded to America, picked up a gentle-

man who was tossing at the mercy of the waves in a small boat off Lundy Island. The gentleman in question was in considerable danger from the smallness of the boat and the size of the waves. He informed those on board that he had visited the island under a commission from a great London philanthropist, to examine into the feasibility of building on it a refuge for superannuated hewers of granite. His mind intent on his philanthropic object, he had been too unmindful of the perils of the deep, trusting himself to a mere cockleshell for a survey of an island situated far from land, and surrounded by the billowy Atlantic. But his rashness had so noble an object that it may well be excused. It is reported that the philanthropist continued his voyage in the ship he had accidentally met, with the intention of visiting America."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. SNOOKSLEY HAWTREY.

THE return of Sir Bayard to his lodging at the inn at Collington was, to his own mind, a somewhat dreary one. His sea-voyage, exciting as it had been, had not inspirited him; it is naturally unsatisfactory to rescue in a romantic manner the object of your affections for the benefit of somebody else. And Sir Bayard, when he returned, was even in worse case than when he had started; for he started without hope, and he returned with despair.

Disappointment, however, is the material

out of which are constructed many of the steps of St. Augustine's ladder. And some of the benefits which Lady Carfax had thought might accrue to Sir Bayard from Clare's acceptance of him, had been, and were being reaped by him from her refusal. The idle man became, or tried to become, the reading man; the loosened principles began to close up into a salutary strictness; the indifferentism got to be somewhat ashamed of itself; and as for the share which that much decried and doubted thing, religion, had in bringing about all this, I shall merely repeat what Sir Bayard had with diffidence imparted to Bell Villeroy as they sailed down the channel, namely, his serious intention of becoming a clergyman.

Possibly the reader may think the idea as ridiculous as the Baronet was afraid it would

appear. For there are some things which the reader—I speak generally, and make him a convertible term with the world—will never understand. He will never grasp the full bearings of the fact that a parson is one thing in the pulpit and another out of it; nor that the novelist and the preacher, treating of one and the same character, will view it differently. The novelist takes little more than our photographs, and we are all much graver, sadder, nay, perhaps wiser than we appear to be. I will even go so far as to quote an extreme case, and to deny that "the implacable beautiful tyrant" is to be put down as the cruellest of triflers, because he fiddled while Rome was burning. He may have fiddled to relieve his overwrought feelings—are not many jests reported from the scaffold? To reaction partly may have been due, in the hour of

death, the composure of Socrates, the mirth of More.

Excellent, however, as were now the intentions of Sir Bayard, and sincere withal, and persevering, it is not to be supposed that he became a strong Great-heart all at once; or even that he blossomed, with tropical rapidity, into the earnest, hard-working, high-church parson, he has since become. When once you have yielded to luxury and idleness, it is some time before you can thoroughly conquer them. When once Accasia has wheedled you into her boat, you find as much difficulty about landing as if the seas she sails on were rough and black with tempest, instead of being overlaid with the marble and purple of summer.

Not that I wish to imply that Sir Bayard did not give up his positive vices altogether and at once. He gave up habits which I

have not dared to hint at more than very obscurely, because, as Thackeray says, no writer may write about men now-a-days as they are, but must drape them, and give them a certain conventional simper. But he could not, all at once, be content to be otherwise than too often idle and pleasure-seeking, much less be satisfied to spend day after day over no books but classical and mathematical tomes, while the shepherds and shepherdesses on the tall chimney-piece in the lonely little inn parlour were his only companions; and having some remote connection with love affairs, reminded him, whenever he lifted his eyes from his work, half ludicrously, half poignantly, of his own unfortunately placed affectious. He thought of this often enough, without the suggestiveness of the inanely smiling statuettes, with which he grew angry; and one morning

broke them all, and presented the landlady as amends with an ormolu clock of the best manufacture.

It was, accordingly, with the more satisfaction that Sir Bayard, after some days of renewed sojourn at the Wheatear, received two morning visitors. They were Snooksley Hawtrey and Baker Villeroy; and as they entered his room together, the Baronet looked up from his Liddell and Scott without displeasure, but rather with wonder at the combination. For it has before been described that there was war between the Tootling Flute-players and the Howling Ojibbeways, and an instance of alliance between the Captains of the respective clubs was unprecedented. It very soon appeared, however, that on the part of the Howling Ojibbeways, so far as concerned their Captain, at least, the hatchet had been buried,

and Snooksley, on his side, was evidently on the most friendly and even fraternal terms with his former social enemy. The purport of his visit was to invite the Baronet to the honour and pleasure of a visit at the Snooksley Hawtreys'; and he held out as an additional inducement, the fact that Baker Villeroy was on a visit there at present. Sir Bayard was glad, not unnaturally, to accept the invitation. Much as he may have admired the classics, he had had of late enough of them; perhaps he could not achieve an enthusiasm respecting them, such as Macaulay's glowing peroration describes in the most eloquent of his suppressed essays. However, he accepted the invitation with alacrity, and was soon being driven in Snooksley's dog-cart to the latter's residence, Baker Villeroy consenting to the back seat, amiable by reason of a huge preliminary lunch.

Snooksley Hawtrey was a man not overwise, not brilliant, but one who generally acted from reasons, and as generally kept those reasons pretty much to himself. He had not acted out of his usual conduct in inviting Sir Bayard, and in bearing no malice for the latter's unfortunate remark, made upon the Collington cricket-field, respecting the personal charms of Honoria and Millicent Hawtrey.

For there had always been, ever since they grew up, a burden upon Snooksley Hawtrey's mind, caused by the existence of his sisters. This weight was the difficulty of advantageously getting rid of them; and as years went on, and they remained on hand, Snooksley began at times to be very much oppressed indeed. He wanted, when his father should die, to have the house to himself. He hated old maids. He wished

to strengthen his county position by ramification, consequently desired that the neighbouring squires should marry his sisters. He would have liked a satisfactory brother-in-law in London, wherefore some rich young Londoners came to be enrolled among the Tootling Flute-players. But they were enrolled in vain. And Snooksley somehow began to be somewhat tired of the noble and manly game of cricket. Often he did not score, he could not bowl —that great consolation to a man when he fails as a batsman—the midday dinner, followed by immediate strong exercise, sometimes disagreed with him. Because they were always breaking their promises to play, and because they would not marry his sisters, he began to loathe the Tootling Flute-players. But, with some heroism, he got up their elevens, collected their sub-

scriptions, did their business, and frequently played with them still—for his sisters' sake. And Tootling Flute-player after Tootling Flute-player came to the house; and even if they flirted, they did not propose.

"Honoria and Millicent are ladylike and not ugly," thought Snooksley. "A Tootling Flute-player is not necessarily vowed to celibacy. Confound it all! queer lot the Villeroys, but I must try Baker—he'll have the property, of course; and he's tolerably steady."

Then, again, he was annoyed especially by an incident which occurred about this time. He chanced to be walking up the long street of Collington, in his every-day manner, which was consequential enough, and somewhat beyond his years, for Snooksley was a staid young man, and always had on his mind the dignity of his position in

the county. This dignity was usually acknowledged in Collington. It was customary for the inhabitants to observe him, when he did them the honour of slowly walking up and down their street, with a certain amount of respect and admiration. If the butcher rode by, he would do so in a less rollicking fashion; the village tailor would survey Snooksley, and faintly try to reproduce the effect of that admired young man (whose clothes were not made in Collington), by means of the coats he cut for the bettermost sort of the villagers. The young women of the village didn't dare to giggle, and hardly to stare, when the important young man passed by. He was even reverenced much more than Baker Villeroy, though the latter excelled him as a cricketer, by the village boys. But about this time an exception to this last rule occurred,

which put Snooksley out as much as more remarkable contemporaneous events did the other personages of this story. He was making one of his progresses up Collington, and the village tailor was gazing with silent admiration at his receding back, when two boys, of exceeding impudence, shouted at him from behind, at a prudent distance of thirty yards.

"Tootling Flute-player! Tootling Flute-player!" the young scamps shouted.

Snooksley heard with horror. He could hardly trust his ears, but he knew he was growing very red in the face. No one was very near him, however, and he went on up the empty rustic street nervously, but without taking any notice. The boys followed, joined by more boys. They were emboldened, somehow or other. Snooksley, though reverenced in a fashion in the

village, was not popular, and the lads were glad to have a chance of making themselves unpleasant with impunity; and they had their will, for at this very moment the Countess of Carfax's carriage, containing the Earl as well as the Countess, swung round into the village from the cross-road leading from the Castle. Snooksley was close at hand, and face to face. The Earl and Countess bowed. Snooksley was lifting his hat, when the boys broke out again—

"Tootling Flute-player! Tootling Flute-player!" the lads exclaimed, more loudly than before.

This was very disagreeable. There was nothing now for Snooksley to do but to march on in as composed a manner as he could. Hot with wrath, he felt he ought to have boxed their ears in the first instance, when there was no one near to witness an

act so derogatory to his dignity. He went on, still pursued, meeting several other people of some position; and the boys followed up, and before they had done with him, vociferated "Tootling Flute-player" several times more.

At home that evening Snooksley was not in a good temper. He spent some hours in meditating how, as for his sister's sake partly, he must remain in the club, he could bring about a change of its name. He felt that his proposal would be consistent, for he had always objected to the name, and had only been overborne by the funny men. Having settled upon a vehemently renewed opposition, he dismissed the subject from his mind as much as possible, and ruminated upon general subjects.

He decided that he would, the next time he met him, give Baker Villeroy an invita-

tion. Of late, whenever they had come across each other, Snooksley had no longer bestowed merely a bow, and a few curt words upon the young man whose position in the county was somehow so much less assured than his own. If an alteration in the terms on which they stood was to be made, both somehow felt that it was Snooksley's place to make it, and Snooksley had made it. He had been very gracious, several times and at various places—on the Wheatear doorstep; at a dinner-party at which, an unusual circumstance, they had both been present; on the platform at Foxfield junction; and meeting him in Collington next day, he asked Baker to dinner, and for the night. I doubt whether Baker Villeroy would have refused an invitation to dinner, if Snooksley had previously pulled his nose in public and tendered no apology.

He accepted, and, the invitation being a verbal one, shook hands most warmly with Snooksley on parting for the time.

Baker had made himself so agreeable during the short period that at first was to comprise his visit at the Hawtreys', that he was asked to protract his stay. And, from which cause he accompanied the Baronet in the dog-cart (a carefully appointed vehicle), which Snooksley drove home, he accepted, not altogether with delight. For the eating at Milverton, the Hawtreys' residence, was not much to his mind; he thought the fare comparatively meagre, and the wine did not flow sufficiently. There was a touch of truth in his idea. The Hawtreys were a family which felt that its duty of duties was to keep up its position. Snooksley Hawtrey was no Ravenswood, the family was neither as poor nor as proud as the master of that lone

Highland tower, circled by clouds and raven's-wings, blacker even than the clouds. You find few extreme developments in ordinary English families; but this comparative poverty, if not the skeleton, was the shabbily clad lay figure, that the Hawtreys had in the closet.

Many of us remember a certain famous sketch of a lady and gentleman, Mrs. and Major Ponto dining with their guest, a Londoner—the two former presenting an imposing appearance at either end of Ponto's table, the latter with the slight constraint upon him of a new visitor. The butler brings in a solitary large dish, and solemnly uncovers. Like a small island in a great sea, a tiny snipe is visible, encompassed with a brown width of gravy. "My love," says Major Ponto, lifting up his eyes as gravely as the butler is standing

behind him—"My love, will you take any game?"

If the reader can imagine what Baker Villeroy's feelings would be if asked to take a cover at such a table as this, there is no need further to point out what prevented him from ecstatically accepting the invitation to prolong his visit at Milverton.

"We hope to have a little archery these next days; some quiet lawn practice, Mr. Villeroy," Honoria said. "It would be such an advantage to us to watch your shooting, for we know you shoot so well."

Baker, indeed, did shoot well, and had long been indignant, in his dull way, because he knew that he would be blackballed if proposed as a member of that select archery club, the archers of the Gair, amongst whom the Miss Hawtreys and their brother, by virtue of their position in the county,

were enlisted, and shot upon every field day.

If Baker practised with the Hawtreys, it was likely to lead to his being privileged to shoot at the same club-targets; and the chance, Baker being always anxious, naturally enough, to make the most of his skill of hand and eye, was not to be rejected.

"After all," he reflected, "there's enough if I make out with big helpings of vegetables."

And he accepted the proposal to stay on. But not at the moment; for, his mind being slow, the inference of Honoria's remark did not strike him at once; but, drawing it half an hour afterwards, he recalled his before given refusal.

"Between you and me, Baker," said Snooksley, graciously receiving Baker's intimation of a change of purpose—"between

you and me, the governor has the most extraordinary reluctance of any man I ever knew to bring out the champagne at dinner. But I'll see he does it, if only for my own sake."

And that evening Snooksley saw that it was done, yet not for his own sake, but for his sisters'. Wine, he knew, was an excellent cosmetic; the indifferent of mornings become the attentive of evenings. He had once, he recollected with a shudder, all but proposed, after an excellent dessert, to a girl with only three hundred a year. Ever since he had been very careful, and ladies had remarked with approval how quiet that very well-conducted young man, Mr. Snooksley Hawtrey, always was when he came out of the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN THE BUTTS.

THE archery came off on the following day, which was that which ensued on the arrival of Sir Bayard—a crisp morning of late autumn, not ill suited for such exercise as is taken between the butts. The practice was carried on with much formality, the gentlemen conducting the ladies by means of their arms from target to target, Sir Bayard at first leading Millicent, and Baker Villeroy Honoria. The targets had been set up by the butler and gardener, who were visible at breakfast moving

to and fro in front of the window on the lawn performing the operation. The targets were good, though much pierced; the appointments generally were of excellent make, but were not too many. Snooksley shot with two short arrows, and there were only as many finger-stalls for the three gentlemen. To Baker's deeper regret, no refection was brought on to the ground. Mulled claret, he thought, and some light, but plentiful edible, might just as well have been served towards eleven o'clock by the butler. It was, however, some consolation to Baker that by this time his card was pricked twice as often as anybody else's.

"What a magnificent shot you are, Mr. Villeroy!" Honoria remarked to him. "You must join our club." And the young lady, lost in admiration at the manly dexterity of

Baker, attached herself considerably to his side, and a little overshot another mark which she had, besides the target, by forcing him to talk to her. Baker was timid in the company of young ladies, and did not like Honoria any the better for being compelled to a constant nervousness.

Honoria's attentions answered the reverse of any design she might have upon Baker. But chance succeeds sometimes where skill fails. Millicent, as well as Baker, began to feel hungry during the forenoon, and going into the house, fetched therefrom, in an elegant *papier mache* basket, a few mixed biscuits. Baker was near her as she returned down the lawn, and, guilelessly enough, she offered him the basket first. She had intended the biscuits to be distributed amongst the four, but Baker at once helped himself to all; and having eaten them, and conceived

a warm feeling towards Millicent, he paid her sheepish attentions during the remainder of the morning, at which Honoria was much mortified, and began to shoot very badly indeed.

"Who's that chap at the bottom of the field?" Baker asked, incidentally.

"I am rather short-sighted, and I cannot see so far," Millicent returned; "but if he is tall, and coming this way, he is very likely to be Captain Pigot. He often joins our morning practice. Is it Captain Pigot, Honoria?"

"Don't know," Honoria replied shortly, not looking, while she strung her bow.

"No," Sir Bayard said, "it is a short, not a tall man."

"And he's turning off," Baker observed, "by the stile. If I was your governor, I'd prosecute him for trespassing. Do you

think Pigot will turn up this morning?"

"I hardly think he will," Millicent said. "He's been very much occupied lately, I believe, with the Rifle corps. I understand they are anxious to alter the plume. Lady Carfax doesn't like it."

"I've heard something about the matter at my quiet quarters at the Wheatear," Sir Bayard remarked. "In fact, my reading has been much disturbed by the deliberations of the battalion. It has had three rather noisy dinners and four meetings in the large club-room, which is just under mine; but as yet, I understand, no conclusion has been reached about the plume."

"They are better without a plume at all," Honoria observed. "I think at least they would look rather less foolish without one than with one. Don't you think so too, Sir Bayard?"

"Captain Pigot, in a plume, presents a majestic appearance," the Baronet said.

"He knows precious little about his drill," Baker Villeroy remarked, chuckling. "I don't think Bob Pigot would come out very strong even in the goose step."

Baker Villeroy in secret rather envied Captain Pigot—a general favourite, and the best cricketer, next to himself, in the neighbourhood. And upon this one subject he attained to sarcasm.

"We had better shoot a few more ends, I suppose," Millicent said. They had left off for a few minutes, pending the present conversation.

Sir Bayard gave Honoria his arm; Baker Villeroy proffered his in an uncouth manner to Millicent (the regular performance of this ceremony had burdened the latter young gentleman's mind during the whole of the

morning), and they went over to the opposite target.

"What did country people do, Miss Hawtrey, before archery and croquet were invented?" Sir Bayard asked. "The men hunted and drank a good deal more than they do now, I suppose. But what did the ladies do with their monotonous hours?"

"I can only say," Honoria returned, "that I am glad I did not live in those days. Even now, country life is tedious enough."

"And town life is tedious, and every kind of life is tedious, somehow," the Baronet said. "It seems a great mistake, somehow, this life of ours, taken by itself. It is all very well for a man to preach to you and tell you to interest yourself in things that are properly interesting—to get a day's delightful study out of a blade of grass, or 'the

meanest flower that blows;' to go in for your poorer fellow-creatures; to find the remedy for *ennui* in work; but somehow or other the medicine is too strong for the patient. Perhaps, however, a certain cure is never abrupt, but gradual. But—by Jove! I beg your pardon, Miss Hawtrey, I am boring you with some thoughts that have lately been running in my mind, more usefully, perhaps, than the frivolity of its former ideas. The upstairs parlour at the Wheatear is a place well suited to meditation.

"I am sure it gives me pleasure to meet with a gentleman who has ideas," Honoria said. "About here there is a scarcity of them."

"Now, Honoria," Millicent said, "the gentlemen are waiting. Shoot."

Honoria shot. She missed, from mental

disturbance, as before; but this time the feeling was pleasurable. She was delighted that Sir Bayard should impart to her not only his small talk, but his serious reflection. She felt the superiority of mind over matter. How much prouder she would be of a husband who could talk philosophy, than of one who could play cricket.

Snooksley, meanwhile, kept himself as much out of the way as possible, while watching operations. He said little.

"I wonder how it is you're so much fonder of cricket than Honoria, Milly?" was one of his few observations.

It was made when the morning's shooting was nearly over, and Baker was awkwardly arming Miss Millicent Hawtrey for the last time across the ground.

"They seem to be pairing off very nicely," he thought to himself. "If Milly would

make a little more running with Baker, so much the better. I suppose I ought to be content if one of the speculations comes off. Wouldn't the Baronet be a catch! and now is the time to get hold of him, just after his disappointment with Clare Vaughton—odd girl, Clare Vaughton!"

Snooksley had thought of Clare for himself, but somehow he was diffident of success; and she had only ten thousand pounds. So he had not adventured with Captain Pigot.

"A man's as likely to be hit after a disappointment as a swallow is on the turn," thus Snooksley continued his rumination. "Honoria may be left to herself; but I think I'll just speak to Milly."

And that afternoon he watched his sister into the green-house, and hastily followed her. She did not at first observe him, and

started from a contemplation of a row of calceolarias, as he touched her on the shoulder.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, turning round. "You so seldom come among the flowers."

"No," her brother replied. "But something may happen, if you choose, which I think highly desirable—you may become Mrs. Baker Villeroy."

"If," Millicent replied, with some spirit, "if Baker Villeroy's ungainly shyness is so excessive that he has commissioned you to propose to me by deputy, so much the better, in one way, for I can refuse in more decided terms. I particularly object to Baker Villeroy, and I will have nothing to say to him."

"What things sisters are!" Snooksley said, despairingly. "It is very selfish of you,

Millicent. You might strengthen the family position, and you won't. I know why——"

"I have told you why," Millicent said, fixing her eyes, however, again upon the calceolarias.

"You've a fancy for Pigot, who hasn't three hundred a year," her brother said.

"You are quite at liberty to think I have a fancy for Captain Pigot, if you like," Millicent returned; "at all events, I have none for Baker Villeroy. I wonder you can think of wanting your sister to marry such a greedy booby," she added indignantly. "And the Villeroys with no county position, too."

"I admit that is a drawback," said her brother. "But he soon will have, with his money. And, seriously, Milly, something must be done. You girls must marry, and you are getting on, as you know. The thing

is becoming ridiculous. I am not in the habit of forming regular schemes for getting you married—but——"

"Why on earth should we be married at all!" broke in Millicent. "Strengthen your county position yourself; when we are old maids we can go to Bath, and we have money enough not to need to trouble you."

"Well, well," Snooksley returned. "What I say is marry a rich man, or marry none at all. Please don't marry Bob Pigot. He's poor, and he's free-handed, and spends a lot."

"Wait till he asks me," Milly said, laying hold of the handle of the greenhouse door. "And you needn't fear I shall be an incubus on you, Snooksley, which I see is the ground of your solicitude. Don't trouble yourself on my account; get married yourself."

This was a cut at one or two of Mr.

Snooksley's ambitions, which had been frustrated.

"You mustn't suppose I don't feel a brother's interest in you at all," Snooksley said. "For your own sakes as well as mine, I want you to marry men of position."

"Men of position don't marry rather plain girls, with very little money," said Milly, opening the door. "And if you don't behave yourself, Snooksley, I will lay myself out for Captain Pigot."

And she passed out, leaving her brother to contemplate the possible results of this threat.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR BAYARD IS GOODNATURED.

WHEN Snooksley Hawtrey disclaimed a character so base as that of a practised matrimonial schemer, he spoke no more than the truth. His present design had been, so far as it was, a regular scheme, his first, and we have seen after how great and long a mental agony it was formed. To speak aright of Snooksley, he ought to be described as a really respectable young man, who would not do, and had not done anything really dishonourable during a much respected existence; excepting some rather

hard treatment of a few young ladies of too small income.

To do him justice, Snooksley had never commenced even a flirtation with a moneyless girl. He had, however, gone some length with several whose incomes, he had ultimately decided, were too small to compensate for the fact that their other attractions did not improve on acquaintance.

Millicent left him in the green-house, much vexed at the disappointment his harmless little plan seemed likely to encounter. There he remained a quarter of an hour or so, fumigating the fuschias and calceolarias. At the end of this period the door again opened, and Snooksley looking, saw the smoke of a cigar, and behind it Baker Villeroy.

That Baker Villeroy should visit a place devoted to the cultivation of flowers, was at

least as surprising as the like conduct on the part of Snooksley Hawtrey. He might have come there to smoke friendlily, but Snooksley had not beforehand informed him of his visit, and he felt somehow that Baker had some especial object in his present arrival.

If, however, the chief of the Ojibbeways had such an intention, it was some time before he could get himself to make it plain. For many minutes he talked of trifles; but being usually taciturn, was so laboriously fluent, that Snooksley's expectations rose still higher. He listened with great graciousness while Baker, amongst other information, described fully some of the longest innings, and he had played some very long ones, which he had achieved during the past season; though a horrid suspicion began to dawn on Snooksley that that style of con-

versation merely prefaced a request that Baker might, through the influence of Snooksley become that very select human being, a Tootling Flute-player.

At least, however, Baker very agreeably surprised him.

"You see," he said, not dovetailing his remark on very well to his last, which was a circumstantial description of his having been erroneously given "out" as leg before wicket—"You see we two chaps have been very friendly lately."

"And I hope our friendship will continue and increase," Snooksley said, not receiving his pleasant surprise as yet.

"Marriage is a doosid awkward thing," Baker said again, with abruptness.

Light broke upon the darkness of Snooksley.

"If I could in any way make it less awk-

ward, supposing you contemplate it, I should be delighted, old fellow," Snooksley said, bringing in the "old fellow" somewhat awkwardly.

"You could," Baker said, desperately flinging his only half finished cigar down into a water tub,—"You could, old chap. I should like—in fact, I am very anxious to marry one of your sisters."

"I share your anxiety," Snooksley said with warmth. Yet, at this eleventh hour, he felt an unexpected shrinking within him, such a feeling as would naturally rise in the breast of a Tootling Flute-player when he heard that marriage was definitely possible between his sister and a Howling Ojibbeway. Position is the Styx an Englishman swears by, and the minuteness of its degrees is naturally in proportion to the high esteem in which we hold it. "But, old fellow," Snooks-

ley asked, "which of my sisters do you contemplate marrying?"

"Well," Baker said, relieving his embarrassment by lighting a fresh cigar, "I don't know. I think, if I had known, I should have gone to her in the first instance. But, you see, as things are, I've come to you first."

"But have you no preference whatever?"

"I like your youngest sister best."

"Millicent?" Snooksley said doubtfully.

"Yes. But I'm not proud," pursued Baker. "You see, what I want to know is, which of them is most likely to like me. A chap doesn't care about being refused, if it can be avoided."

"Of course not," Snooksley said. "The feeling is very natural."

Snooksley, though gratified that Baker had come forward, felt himself in a di-

lemma. He was but a tyro at his present game, and was, just now, more bewildered and confused than, it may be recollected, was that veteran, Mrs. Villeroy, at a previous similar crisis, at which, by reason of a certain odd fate which seemed to attend him, Sir Bayard Beevor complicated a matrimonial scheme. Snooksley, just now, bearing in mind that Sir Bayard had shown something that might be construed into a liking for his sister Honoria, hesitated about securing Baker Villeroy at once for her, and so throwing away so golden a chance. While, as for Millicent, she had spoken her mind on the matter, and in such a manner that he did not care to open the subject again. Thus, while Baker smoked vehemently, Snooksley, in some distress, meditated. Hurriedly, he resolved to temporise. The worst of it was, he thought, that Sir Bayard

being reputed to be the reverse of a precipitate, and even of an energetic man, it might be months before he was brought to book; but Snooksley determined to force matters, if possible, during the present week.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "You wait a week, and, by that time, I will find out for you which likes you best—I am sure they both admire you—at least your shooting; girls like that sort of thing."

"Yes," Baker said. "But I'm not a clever chap. They like 'mind,' as they call it."

"A clever chap," said Snooksley—"a cricketer—a clergyman, any of those three C's can do pretty much as he likes with the girls. But look here, old fellow—there's just one thing. You'll stop here this week, of course. Now girls are romantic, and they suffer from the absurdest possible

wrongheadedness about a man having a good appetite. You've a fair appetite."

"Middling good," Baker said,—"middling good, sometimes."

"Well, then, just for a week, my dear boy, moderate it."

At this suggestion Mr. Baker Villeroy looked rather uncomfortable, and, without replying, went out of the green-house. Snooksley followed him.

"You'll excuse a rude, but friendly suggestion," he said, clapping him on the back gently.

"Oh yes," Baker said. "But I'll turn it over."

And, as meditation prefers solitude, Snooksley thought it best to leave his friend, and to return to the greenhouse, where he sat for an hour and a half on a green wire

chair and benefited the plants again by fumigation.

When he left the greenhouse he had decided in his mind that the plan which he had adopted in the hurry forced upon him, was that which he would have formed after mature deliberation; and, contented with this reflection, he went on through the shrubberies not unhopefully. The Milverton shrubberies were tolerably thick, though the avenue had been in former days more closely lined with trees than it was now, for some of the more valuable ones had, from time to time, been felled. Coming along one of the paths, Snooksley heard voices. The speakers were hid from him by some box and lilac bushes, but he recognised the voices at once as those of his sister Honoria and Sir Bayard Beevor. Snooksley was

not an habitual eavesdropper, but he stopped a minute.

"Then I do not ask your consent in vain," he heard Sir Bayard say. "That marriage is an important step, is a remark which has been made very often, and truisms are always the truest of remarks, of course. Have I your consent, Miss Hawtrey?"

"Subject to mamma's approval, you have," Honoria returned.

Snooksley peered through a lilac bush, which, bare on its branches at this season, gave him an opportunity. He had already no doubt as to who were the interlocutors he had overheard; but eye now confirmed ear —he saw Honoria and Sir Bayard. The paths upon which he and the other two respectively stood converged at a short distance in front. So Snooksley, with steps as noiseless as possible, retreated slowly to the greenhouse,

exulting. All the boys of Collington might have shouted after him now, and he would have scattered pence among them in reply.

Half an hour afterwards the first dinner-bell rang—the dinner-bells at Milverton resounded over the adjacent country. Snooksley issued forth again and reached the house without meeting anyone. He was half through his dressing operations when some one knocked at the door of his dressing-room, an apartment rather thinly furnished, but adorned with a rack for cricket-bats, and a large photograph of the first eleven of the Tootling Flute-players. Without waiting for an answer the person who had knocked at the door entered.

"Well, old chap!" he said.

"Well," responded Snooksley. "Can I lend you anything in the way of dress? The second bell will go soon."

He was in an excellent temper, but felt, nevertheless, that Baker Villeroy was by this time superfluous.

"Wish me joy," Baker exclaimed, seizing a bat out of the rack, and brandishing it.

"Wish you joy?" Snooksley asked, staring, and suspending the arrangement of a neck-tie. "My dear fellow, the dressing-room is small, and you have got a good swing on that bat."

"Hurray!" Baker called out, in a high state of excitement; "I shall be able to eat as much as I like at dinner to-day."

"What *do* you mean, Villeroy?" the other asked.

"Why," Baker explained, growing a little calmer, and leaning on the bat, "I didn't see the fun of starving myself for a week, so I just made up my mind to try my luck at once. Your sister has accepted me. You

don't look very pleased," Baker said, rather wonderingly.

A tumult of thoughts rushed through the other's mind. He had seen as well as heard Honoria and the Baronet in the shrubbery. Was he dreaming? Had Honoria accepted both? Ridiculous! Had Baker Villeroy suddenly gone frantic? Had he been drinking?"

"You don't seem as pleased as I expected," Baker said, observing upon his friend's countenance some symptoms of all this mental confusion.

"Do you say you are engaged to her—to my sister—to Honoria?"

"To Honoria?" Baker returned. "No, to Millicent."

It was well that Snooksley had finished his shaving operations, or he would have stood in need of court-plaister. Astonish-

ment at first conquered every other feeling.

Well," he gasped, "this beats cockfighting! *Varium et mutabile semper femina!*"

"You are a cleverer fellow than I am. What do you mean by that beastly Latin?" Baker Villeroy asked, rather sulkily.

"My dear fellow," Snooksley said, seizing his hand, and giving it the heartiest shake he had ever bestowed on any member of that kind, "I congratulate you; you took me by surprise, after what I had suggested."

"You'll excuse my not following your advise," Baker said.

"Whoever does follow advice?" asked Snooksley, radiantly. Here the second bell rang.

"By George!" Baker said, and distress succeeded joy on his countenance. "Dinner, and I'm as rough as a badger!"

"Never mind. Come down without dressing," Snooksley said. And it was a very great thing for a Hawtrey to say.

CHAPTER XV.

SNOOKSLEY IS FURTHER EMBARRASSED.

SNOOKSLEY HAWTREY had been bewildered by the contradictoriness of human nature which he discovered in his sister Millicent. He was not relieved from his bewilderment by the demeanour of the various diners at his father's table. From the arrangements as to who should be taken in by whom, he was not able to draw any conclusion, for that order had been previously settled, and was now adhered to.

But he had expected to see Honoria de-

licately conscious of her delightful situation in regard to the Baronet. On the contrary, she seemed to ignore him, and gazed much on Baker Villeroy. Baker Villeroy did not reciprocate her looks, which seemed to disconcert her; but, after paying undivided attention to the first courses, he began, just before the sweets came in, to stare steadily at Millicent, without, however, offering any observation. This he did continuously, except in three short intervals, during which he ate five strawberry puffs, to the great indignation of Mrs. Hawtrey, who meant the dish to serve for two days. His staring did not surprise Snooksley, but Millicent's return did; for after looking at Baker more than once with evident surprise, she said at last,

"Mr. Villeroy, you make me uncomfortable; is there anything remarkable in my appearance this evening?" And Millicent

was so clearly astonished, that Snooksley could not make it out at all, and began to think that the occurrences of the day were a dream altogether, and that he was still asleep. And, to make his confusion worse confounded, towards the end of dinner, when Millicent took open notice of Baker's staring, Sir Bayard began to grow rather strange in his manner, answering off the point some ordinary remarks of old Mr. Hawtrey's, and looking very much perplexed. Some game at cross purposes was evidently going on, and everybody, as we do in such cases, was more or less conscious of it, and was glad when the ladies rose. Then came the climax. Baker, with unwonted politeness, rose and held the door open. And, as Millicent passed him, last of all, he followed her into the hall.

"I shall come out sooner than the other

chaps," she heard him whispering behind her, "and sit beside you."

Millicent, hardly believing her ears, stopped, turned, and said,

"You have taken too much wine already, sir; come out as soon as you like, the sooner the better; but sit as far from me as possible, if you please."

And she spoke in so angry a tone that Baker, flushed as he was with sherry, shrank back crestfallen; and returning in dudgeon to the dining-room, he sat down by Sir Bayard, and said there must be some mistake.

Sir Bayard, during his stay at Milverton, had been behaving in a manner which may have surprised anyone who does not recollect that this view of his conduct is merely taken from the standpoint of other persons. The truth was, that he had merely paid

Honoria some slight attentions at first out of good-nature, seeing Baker, as he thought, behaving rather rudely at the archery, by showing an open preference for Millicent. Hope exaggerates. And Snooksley had inferred far too much. The Baronet's mind did not ingrove itself with the Hawtrey run of thought, nor, indeed, could it at all recall itself from its regret for his failure with Clare Vaughton, and for the other failures of his life. Sorrow and repentance had got too good a hold of the young man at present, at least, to allow him to be more than outwardly frivolous, gay, sociable, whatever you please. He felt some solace in doing good-natured things, and he had just done two. One has been noted. The other was on behalf of Baker. That young gentleman had come to him a few hours before in great tribulation, stating

that he wished to propose to Miss Millicent Hawtrey. He added that he had good reasons for making the offer upon this very day, but that he was unequal, from natural timidity, to the effort. Would Sir Bayard be a good chap, and do it for him. He would have asked Snooksley, but Snooksley wanted him to wait a week; but there were excellent reasons, the young man repeated, for doing it now.

Sir Bayard pointed out the absurdity of this suggestion; but after a while, not much caring in his present mood what he did, assented —promised, at least, to pave the way, as he expressed it. Recollecting what Snooksley overheard in the shrubbery, we can easily gather that Sir Bayard "paved the way" to some purpose.

When Baker, returning just now, told him there was some mistake, Sir Bayard,

who, silent and perturbed, had been absently cutting a small slice of pineapple into very minute pieces, was struck with decided consternation.

"It is as I feared—it must be," he said, after a pause. "What a fool I am, and a bigger one every day! It struck me at dinner. The fact is, these two girls are very much alike, you know."

"Yes," Baker said, "till you know 'em."

"Well," Sir Bayard returned, "practically I don't know them, though I've been two days in the house. It always takes longer time for a short-sighted man to learn new faces; and I'm so absent-minded just now, that somehow I've been taking Millicent for Honoria and Honoria for Millicent. It's a fearful result," he said, carrying on all this conversation *sotto voce*, while Snooksley was looking hard at him from the other side of

the table. "Fearful!" and he spoke with much agitation. "The poor girl!"

"Oh, never mind the girl so much," Baker said, biting off three parts of a pear. "What is it you've made me do? I don't understand."

"By proxy—through me—I am very sorry and ashamed to say," Sir Bayard returned, "you've proposed not to Millicent, but to Honoria."

"Oh," Baker said, "is that all?"

"What are you two men hammering at?" Snooksley, with assumed gaiety, asked from the other side of the table.

"Isn't it enough?" Sir Bayard muttered despairingly, without heeding Snooksley.

"It'll do very nicely," Baker said, taking a large quantity of almonds and raisins. "I'll be in the drawing-room soonest, after all."

Sir Bayard began to be relieved in his mind, but had not recovered from his astonishment when, five minutes afterwards, Baker left him—and the rest.

Both old and young Hawtrey looked after the former's early departure with some curiosity. Mr. Hawtrey senior's mind was satisfied by an interview in the library that evening, not a very well stocked one. He gave an affable consent.

Though Sir Bayard's mistake had the unexpected good fortune of leading to pleasant rather than to unpleasant consequences, he left Milverton very shortly after its commission—early, in fact the next morning. He was tired of making blunders, on his own account and on that of other people.

"I must take to spectacles," he thought, somewhat dolefully; and it is natural that a young man should look with alarm upon

this prospect. "One's eye-glass is always dropping out," he said to himself, as he stood on the platform at Foxfield Junction; and at that moment it dropped from his eye.

Leaving his last mistake to be a secret from all except the now accepted Baker Villeroy, and Snooksley, who, by reason of Baker's engagement, had some balm for a considerable disappointment, Sir Bayard had been driven to the Wheatear, and, having settled his little matters there, was taking the train for Oxford.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM.

WITH a wonderful peace and happiness at that heart which had long been dark and troubled, Bell Villeroy returned to Collington. Yet, although Clare was with him, he felt a sadness, gentle as summer rain, as he drew near and recollected that it was with Frank Irvine that, a wandering tourist, he had caught his earliest glimpse of that quiet western village, and its quieter blue hills.

Clare and Bell had reached Bristol by the packet in the afternoon, and were driving

into Collington, while the sun, a red, rayless globe, was going down at the end of a crisp bright November day.

"So I am to leave off being a cynic," Bell said, rousing himself from a brief reverie, brought on by the memory of Frank Irvine.

"And I 'my little turn for satire,' as Byron calls it," Clare said.

"I fear we shall become colourless without these same faulty idiosyncrasies," Bell remarked. "But we can lessen them."

Clare made no answer. And, indeed, the remark was a puzzling one, and requires more time and thought for a rejoinder than is allowed to a young lady's impromptus.

Bell laid his lash lightly across the horse's shoulder, as they passed the first house at the entrance of Collington, that Clare might

escape as far as possible the attentions of the curious inhabitants. But her face, albeit paler than its wont, was recognized, and recognized Bell driving quickly by, noted everywhere with honest pleasure. She moved once or twice to some of the poorest passers-by, but was spared anything more. So they drove up to the Lodge.

A week afterwards Clare wrote the following letter:—

"My dear Lady Carfax,

"I write to tell you that I am engaged to be married. My engagement is to Mr. Bell Villeroy, my cousin after a fashion, the son of my uncle's brother, who has lately" (here there were some erasures), "after a long absence, returned from America. When first we met, which was before I had so pleasant a visit at the Castle, I had no idea

we were related." (Here Clare Vaughton enlightens Lady Carfax as to the circumstances which so materially prevented Sir Bayard Beevor's success in his proposals).

"I daresay you are aware that my cousin Baker pursued, but did not catch, poor Luciana and Marmaduke. They were married in Liverpool, and are now living in the Isle of Man, at Mr. William Villeroy's expense. Marmaduke, also at Mr. William Villeroy's expense, is going to the collegiate school at Douglas. For my part, I think the thing cannot now be helped, and I shall make the best of it. Marmaduke is good-looking and clever. Still, it is very deplorable.

"My aunt is well and kind. I regret to say that Captain Pigot is now in her bad books, much as she once admired him. She goes about saying he behaved shockingly to Luciana Mary. I must say I think there is

no ground for the accusation. Poor Captain Pigot! It is a pity you did not witness his exploits at the last review. He performed prodigies of valour; but I have lately read in Sallust (I am renovating my little Latin for the benefit of Freddy) that it is seldom that you find courage united with conduct; and Captain Pigot is an instance in point, for he got his battalion into a dreadful entanglement with some cavalry. I understand that the inspecting Colonel was publicly rude to him. I hear, and I am happy to hear, that, notwithstanding some demur on the part of that autocrat over his family Snooksley, he has just offered to Millicent Hawtrey (whom I always rather liked), and has been accepted by her. My cousin Baker is engaged to her sister Honoria, and I daresay it will be a tolerably comfortable union.

"Sir Bayard Beevor, as I dare say you know, has been staying at Milverton lately, but without any matrimonial result. He has behaved to me nobly and unselfishly, and the improvement which you proposed to make in him, with my assistance, is being accomplished, I think, without,

"Yours affectionately,

"CLARE VAUGHTON."

And now this story is ended. Thinking over it, I cannot but be conscious how much it has of defect, artistically, charitably, perhaps morally. And the imperfection of the story is certainly not more obvious than, from it, is the imperfection of the story-teller. But this betrayal must always be made by those who try to write not clever, second, or third-hand reproductions, brilliant centos merely, but the results of their own

observations. These make display of their worst, as well as of their best; they lay bare, with the workings of the hearts of others, those of their own.

Yet all this defect, all this artistic defect, at least, is nothing, if the one end has been gained. If the writer's ear has but caught, however faintly, however imperfectly, something of that long, strange music, now sweet, now sad, now loud, now low, to which, generation after generation, men are born, and live their lives; if he has truly recorded what he has heard; if, while he wrote, the length as well as the brevity of life has been with him (for life with the artist is long, as with the preacher it is short); if he has intensely felt how sweet memory is, and how strong forgetfulness, and how the years fail from under his pilgrim's feet, with their bitterest grief,

their most poignant pain, with their dark and grave, and bright and flowery hours, with triumph and defeat, with burning love and biting care, with unlovely places we might not, and pleasant we would not leave, with wedding and passing bells, with the melancholy departure of youth, with the living we forget, and the dead we tenderly remember. He who has heard this mingled musical refrain, even in part, and imperfectly, has done what few may do; and giving it to us, does worshipfully.

And yet he may do more. More faintly, more imperfectly still, his transcript may be, and being faithful to truth, should be illumined with the pure, dim starlight, that steadily shines along the darkness; while wandering fire after fire but rises to fall, but shoots to pass away. Life is mindful, after all, of heaven, nor altogether the earthly

thing it is so often painted. Our writers deceive us in this matter. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of;" more goodness is added by divine reinforcement than the reticent Christian of England declares, more sin is sinned than comes to our knowledge, and most of it because so vainly was poured forth the bloody sweat of Gethsemane.

My story, I said, was ended. Yet I may add to it one closing scene.

Exactly a year after the death of Frank Irvine, a train that reached the little station of Castle about midday, left on its platform a lady and gentleman, who were not among the passengers accustomed to get out there. However, the gentleman seemed to be acquainted with the district; for he passed with the lady, who walked quickly and

easily at his side, up some intricate hill roads, making no inquiry of his way. They walked nearly a mile, and stopped at the lych gate of a small churchyard on the crest of the hill, a windy spot. The solemn refrain of the wind was heard just now in the firs around, and in the heavy yews within the graveyard.

The air must ever there, it seemed, be buoyant; and, in summer, flowers not a few might grow between the thinly scattered graves. The strangers paused under the largest yew. Beneath it was a grave fenced with a stone-edging, and headed by a low stone, upon which was carved a single *fleur-de-lis*, and a simple inscription, "FRANCIS IRVINE." A plain cross surmounted it. The two visitors stood by it long, and yet all the time they were silent—but for one or two sobs which came,—not from the girl. They

stood for a long time, and she, to whom perhaps the region was new, looked from the graves to the west, where the great plain stretched to its misty and smoky frontiers, and to the east, where the valleys wound, and the clouds raked the œonian hills, sweeping and curling just as, a year ago, they had swept and curled over the wanderings of Frank Irvine and Bell Villeroy.

At last she looked at her watch, and came back to where her companion still remained, standing with his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the epitaph.

She did not speak to call his attention. Instead, she laid her ungloved hand gently on his arm. You could hardly have seen that she wore a wedding-ring, for its lustre was darkened by the gloom of the ponderous yew that hung over the grave of Francis Irvine.

"Are you jealous of the dead, Clare?" her husband asked, in a quiet voice.

"No!" Clare returned, dropping her hand till it rested upon his. "For I know you will be true to me, even as you were to him."

THE END.

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